THE ORDINARY MAN
AND
THE EXTRAORDINARY THING

The Ordinary Man and the Extraordinary Thing

By

HAROLD BEGBIE

AUTHOR OF "SOULS IN ACTION," "OTHER SHEEP," "TWICE BORN MEN," &C.

HODDER & STOUGHTON
NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

. . . the pressure of the soul has increased among mankind, . . . its mysterious influence is diffusing itself among the people.

It is well that men should be reminded that the very humblest of them has the power to "fashion, after a divine model that he chooses not, a great moral personality, composed in equal parts of himself and the ideal; and that if anything lives in fullest reality, of a surety it is that."

If you knew that you were going to die to-night, or merely that you would have to go away and never return, would you, looking upon men and things for the last time, see them in the same light that you have hitherto seen them? Would you not love as you have never yet loved? Is it the virtue or the evil of the appearances around you that would be magnified? Would it be given you to behold the beauty or the ugliness of the soul?

. . . of so many in this world does the aim seem to be the discouragement of the divine in their soul.

May it not be the supreme aim of life . . . to bring to birth the inexplicable within ourselves; and do we know how much we add to ourselves when we awake something of the incomprehensible that slumbers in every corner?

. . . the soul is like a dreamer, enthralled by sleep, who struggles with all his might to move an arm or raise an eyelid.

We must be heedful; it is not without fit reason that our soul bestirs itself.

MAURICE MAETERLINCK.

(*Translated by Alfred Sutro.*)

TO

MY FRIEND

PERCY L. PARKER

EDITOR OF THE INDISPENSABLE REVIEW

"PUBLIC OPINION"

PREFACE

IN this book the endeavour is made to bring home to the minds of men one of those great and central truths of life which are so often ignored in the pressure of surface existence. This particular truth may be expressed in various ways :

> The veritable life of a man is lived, not visibly and externally, but in the impenetrable solitude of his soul.
>
> Profound and extraordinary changes of soul are experienced by the most ordinary of men.
>
> Conversion is not generally a sudden and catastrophic experience, but for most men a gradual and imperceptible process of development.
>
> Without religion, the moral and physical progress of those great masses of humanity who carry the fortunes of civilisation can never be assured.

The narratives which form the main body of this book are true stories of the lives of men ; and they witness, in the midst of all their differences and all the variety of their circumstances, to the truth of Maeterlinck's assertion that in this present time "the pressure of the soul has increased among mankind."

An unknown correspondent, the librarian of a university in America, writing to me about *Broken Earthenware* and *In the Hands of the Potter*, asked me some months ago to write a book dealing with "the conversions of ordinary people, respectable men and women, who do not indulge in drunkenness, or theft, or lying, or gross immorality." He went on to say, "Because of the conditions that surround them, many people know only those who belong to the respectable classes, and I am sure that many of your readers, of whom I am one, would welcome a work narrating the religious experiences of our brethren who belong neither to the 'submerged tenth' nor to the 'four hundred.'"

Of course, the supreme test of religion is its influence upon the central host of humanity. If education and refinement can safeguard civilisation, and if the bulk of mankind can advance in virtue and righteousness without religion, such conversions as are narrated in *Broken Earthenware* might well become merely curious and interesting problems in psychology.

The investigations which form the body of this book represent an attempt to get at the heart of the ordinary man, to penetrate to that inner consciousness which is the true life of the individual, to reach and explore those recesses of the soul where decisions are made in secret and character is formed in silence—an attempt to understand the communion which exists between the man in the street and the God in his soul. The result of these investigations has been the conviction that now, as ever, the heart of representative man is in search of God.

The character of the search has changed, the vast adventure of life is tangled with a hundred complexities, it is not now so easy to believe, or to believe in the manner of our ancestors ; for, as Joubert says, it is more difficult to be a modern than an ancient ; but, nevertheless, fundamental to our complex civilisation is the quest of the human heart for that everlasting rest, security, and peace which only faith in a good and compassionate Creator can bestow. The stories which compose the pages of this book, not only witness to the truth of this proposition, but prove that civilisation is not safe without religion, that society cannot organise itself without God.

The reader of this book will find himself walking in the main streets of civilisation, along the most crowded high roads of human progress ; not, as in *Broken Earthenware*, threading narrow and mephitic alleys, standing with awe and disgust in his soul before the dark entries and filthy doorways of back streets, where civilisation has made its dust heap. He will discover, however, that in the main streets of modern life there are strange and almost unbelievable realities hidden behind the respectable walls. He will be amazed, I think, by the romance and mystery which exist in the commonplace. And I do not think it will be possible for him, if he is an honest man, to doubt that religion is essential to the progress of the human race—more essential to the central host of humanity than to the poor broken and unhappy wretches who creep through life in the shadows and the deprivations of the back streets of civilisation.

I must make the confession that it has been more difficult for me to write this book than to write *Broken Earthenware*. I went for my materials to a wonderful Brotherhood which has overspread the world, which has made itself one of the great safeguards of civilisation, and which is composed of respectable men representative of humanity's central host. But the ordinary man does not easily discuss the inward mystery of his life. Even where his confidence is won, and even where he is anxious for the sake of others to tell the story of his life, even here, in spite of his education and knowledge of the world, he is far less able to express himself than the humble man who has been broken on the wheel of life. It is not so much that he shrinks from speaking of his spiritual experiences, as that his very effort to be intellectual and intelligent in his account of the miracle renders him obscure and sometimes unconvincing. He has none of that elemental reality, none of that fervour of a great gratitude, which makes the humbler man who has suffered tremendously, so movingly eloquent, so entirely convincing, so splendidly real.

A certain critic of my books, writing in a Roman Catholic review, admitted the wonder of these documents of conversion, but averred that the reading of them made him shudder. *It is as if*, he said, *a reporter were present taking notes at our private devotions.* Hypersensitive people may applaud this sentiment, and may even relish the sneer which it conveys ; but a mind of more robust force will perceive its dreadful immodesty. For someone " reported " the Agony in Gethsemane ;

and if the private prayer of the Son of God may be given to the world, our little sorrows, our little agonies, our little experiences of God's mercy and forgiveness, *if they can help mankind*, may surely be given freely to those who are still comfortless. Are we really to suppose that God is whispering into our ears a confidence which is only for us ?—that anything which happens to us is meant to be hoarded in the secrecy of our souls as a private benefaction ?—that we are the favourites of heaven called apart into an empty room to receive gifts and treasures which must be hidden from our brothers and sisters ?

The real truth of this matter has been declared by Christ Himself :

> " Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.
>
> " And he saith, Master, say on.
>
> " There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most ?
>
> " Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.
>
> " And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

The ordinary man, I think, and particularly the ordinary man of the religious world, does not yet understand the meaning of that strange word, *Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.* He does not realise why it was that

Christ sought sinners, was happier in the company of sinners than in the company of Scribes and Pharisees, was actually the Friend of Sinners. He is still entangled in the meshes of dogmatic theology. He does not perceive that the hunger of heaven is for the love of the human heart, for the overflowing, grateful, and self-forgetting passionate love of humanity ; not for a credo, not for the repetition of formal prayers, not for faithful loyalty to a piece of ecclesiastical machinery. Love is the secret of Christ. And it is because *to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little*, that the gaze of Christ is turned more tenderly towards the sinner and the outcast than towards the respectable and the religious.

Pascal, writing of the prophecies mentioned in the New Testament, exclaims : "You believe that they are reported to make you believe. No, it is to keep you from believing." This quite devilish idea of a kind of hide-and-seek between God and man still exists under various forms among religious people. They dress it up in a less revolting shape than the honesty of Pascal permitted him to employ ; but in reality it is the same black, sinister, and un-Christly spectre masquerading as the true religion

> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose,
> An evil soul, producing holy witness,
> Is like a villain with a smiling cheek ;
> A goodly apple, rotten at the heart ;
> O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath !

And the truth is so simple, is so palpable, is so persuasive and reasonable. A merciful God, a heavenly Father, asks of His creatures the love of their hearts, asks for that love, not because it is

necessary to Him, but because it is essential to their own welfare, is the one power by which they can come to harmony with the universe, the one means by which they can grow in the likeness of their Creator, and inherit the joys prepared for them before the foundation of the world. Love is the secret, love is the way, and love is the truth. *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* The conversion of a respectable man can be as wonderful and beautiful a thing as the conversion of a great sinner; but it is seldom that the result of that conversion utters itself in an uprush of burning and torrential love which bursts the flood-gates of self-repression, and flows over the whole brotherhood of man in a tide of self-forgetting care and compassion.

But difficult as it has been to write this book—and I have made no effort to exaggerate the miracle or to embroider its consequences—I venture to think that it shows in a very useful manner one particular aspect of conversion which is almost entirely neglected by students of psychology. One of my correspondents, an English engineer living in Burmah, assures me that conversion is a matter of "cortical susceptibility," and many others seem to share the delusion common to materialists that conversion is always the result of some form of emotional excitement. This idea is entirely foolish. It limits its painful diagnosis to the single moment of conversion, and conveniently ignores the long after-life of virtue, self-sacrifice, and newborn holiness. It explains, or imagines that it

explains, how a man loses the evil habits of a lifetime in the shock of a nervous excitement; but it does not explain, does not attempt to explain, how it is that long after the excitement has worn away, that life continues in its new path, calm, tranquil, and pure with the love of God.

And these critics with their "cortical susceptibilities" and "explosions of nervous energy," limit their investigations of conversion to those examples of the miracle which become public property through the chronicles of revivalism. It is now a vulgar idea that conversions only follow upon the energies and often the hysterical absurdities of professional revivalists. It would be fatal to religion if such were the case. No one, I think, could more detest the professional revivalist than myself, and than myself no one could more entirely doubt the lasting effect of the majority of conversions accomplished by this means. I can see the need for revivalism, and I can see in the future a development of revivalism which will be of noble service to humanity; but I dislike the un-Christly character of these worked-up excitements, and I am utterly uninterested by their results.

Conversion, real conversion, however—as I showed even in *Broken Earthenware*—is almost always the effect of individual loving-kindness, of personal and quiet love, of intercourse between a happy and an unhappy soul in the normal colloquies of friendship, of passionate seeking of the lost by those whose lives are inspired by unselfish love. It may possibly have its culminating point in a public meeting; the act of standing up and publicly

declaring for righteousness may have tremendous effect; but even in such cases, such rare cases, the preparation has usually been long and difficult, secret and gradual. And now in this book I show that conversion is a quite common experience among ordinary men, is very often nothing more than a secret turning of the face towards God, a private decision to live a new life, a personal and wholly tranquil choice of the soul for Christ as its Master and Saviour. No priest appears to be necessary, the excitements of the revivalist preacher are absent; in the privacy of its own soul, the spirit turns from evil and faces towards good.

It is a matter of great importance to make this truth of conversion more widely known. No occasion should be lost to teach the ordinary man that this central fact of religious experience is not the property of the revivalist. The truest case of normal conversion, the conversion of the ordinary man, is that told in the parable of the prodigal son. There was no one present when he came to himself in a far country; and when he said, "I will arise and go to my father," he was neither the victim of mental excitement nor the hypnotised hysteric of a religious meeting. When he turned he was converted. And when he was yet a great way off his father saw him—only his father—and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

Such conversions are common. Christianity recruits its ranks from them.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

I

WHEN a newspaper boy runs through the streets with the cry of "Horrible tragedy!" he is exalted by something more than the certainty of good fortune. Regard his excited eyes, the strain of the muscles round his mouth, the effort of the body to hurl itself ahead of the hurrying legs, the obvious awe and self-importance of a spirit charged with evil tidings. He knows nothing of the news except its headline. Unconscious that he himself is horrible tragedy, he runs in his foul rags through the mud of the gutters thrilled by the mere announcement of horror. . . . Tragedy has occurred, and, the gods be thanked, horrible tragedy. He bawls the adjective with an almost overpowering sincerity, lopping with the shears of his trembling lips the mild, inoffensive, and emasculating "H." Thus does he make tragedy more than tragedy, and horrible tragedy a thing of awe to which the mere printed letters of these two words afford nothing like so gruesome an index. His sudden cry breaking with hoarse and terrifying menace on the winter darkness of suburban roads, shattering the decorum of tea-parties and bursting like a storm upon the fireside calm of uneventful domesticity,

is like the trumpet of death. It brings the invisible world about the head of those trivial commonplaces. The clangorous wings of calamity smite that villa comfort in the face. And the terror is welcomed; the doors are thrown open to receive the horror. It is something to talk about.

Humanity, clearly, is still in the barbarous stage where the drama of life without action, violent action, is reckoned dull and tedious. The multitude must have murders, suicides, divorces, and political crises in their newspapers; a novel which describes the religious evolution of a soul is relegated sometimes even by judicious critics to the ponderous shelf of theology; a play which does not excite the crude passions is pronounced a tiresome excursion in psychology; even sermons to be popular must flash with a little lightning and reverberate with a morsel of thunder.

It is difficult for men to realise that the only veritable life is the life of the inward sanctuary, the life of silence and communion with invisible and everlasting truth. Like children, they want something to happen. Like children, they do not want to feel, but to be made to feel. They are perhaps afraid of the solitude of their conscience.

"I admire Othello," says Maeterlinck, "but he does not appear to me to live the august life of a Hamlet, who has the time to live, inasmuch as he does not act. Othello is admirably jealous. But is it not perhaps an ancient error to imagine that it is at the moments when this passion, or others of equal violence, possess us, that we live our truest

lives?" And then follows the profound and beautiful passage:—

> "I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his arm-chair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—an old man, who conceives not that all the powers of this world, like so many heedful servants, are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fibre of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that closes, or a thought that springs to birth—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or 'the husband who avenges his honour.'"[1]

II

The trouble about this universal love of horror and calamity and violent action lies in its influence upon the journalist from whom so many people take their ideas of life. Because Murder multiplies

[1] *The Treasure of the Humble.* Translated by Alfred Sutro. (George Allen & Sons.)

editions and Divorce or Crisis sends up the sales to a zenith of prosperity, it is conceived that all bad news is profitable and all good news is dull. And from this reasoning proceed the pessimism, the cynicism, the hysteria, and even the despair which characterise the modern newspaper. If one's knowledge of life were obtained only from the newspaper, who would not conclude that mankind is now staggering at the edge of a precipice, with ruin darkening over its head, and perdition yawning at its feet? Such a word as "Unrest" is seized hungrily and repeated so apprehensively that it comes to mean, not an awakening of the human soul, not an uprising of dim multitudes from mental torpor to spiritual consciousness, but a menace to civilisation and a portent of cataclysm. Such a phrase as "The Cost of Living" is noisily bruited till it quite obscures the simple, silent fact that never hitherto in the history of organised mankind have the necessities of life been cheaper or the luxuries of life so universally shared by society. And, worse still, all that is dark, tragic, discouraging, and perilous in modern life is so harped upon, so underlined, emphasised, and reiterated that the immense energy of religious activity and the splendid impulse of social service, which are everywhere carrying humanity forward to the fuller glory of its destiny, are smothered and obliterated out of knowledge.

Truly might one conclude from the newspaper that righteousness stands paralysed before the advancing frontiers of hell, and that love lies bleeding at the feet of Satan.

III

Now, as everyone desires to have beautiful surroundings, and chooses furniture, pictures, and wall-papers for their charm and graciousness; and as friends are sought among the best and sweetest of humanity, not among the most terrible and repulsive—should we not seek for the furniture of our minds, and the companions of our souls, thoughts that are beautiful and encouraging, knowledge that is strengthening and uplifting? Should we not resolutely turn our backs upon all that is morbid, gruesome, violent, and hysterical, and keep our face steadfastly and cheerfully towards the calm light of hope which burns upon the forward way of human progress? For if we do not decorate our walls with pictures of murder and treasonable lust, and ask to our table the criminal financier, the hangman, the screaming journalist, and the brazen woman of fashion, why should we care to read about sordid and disgusting things in the newspaper, or occupy our minds with the vulgarities of second-rate people and the never-ending crises of sensationalism?

Infamy has its tens, evil its hundreds, and vulgarity its thousands; but the central host of humanity, the grand army of mankind, which is ever marching to stronger victories over sin and nobler visions of the universe, which is actuated by righteousness and impelled by love, which is kind, tender, considerate, and unselfish, which is hopeful and not despairing, which is noble and not base, which is happy and not sad, and which is doing all

the great and solid work of humanity—this, the central host, is numbered by millions and tens of millions, and the variety of its employment covers the whole field of human enterprise.

To acquaint ourselves as often and as deeply as possible with all the good that is being done in the world, with all the kindness that is sweetening existence, with all the victories of love which are exalting and redeeming human nature in every street and parish of the globe on which we live, this is to escape from the gloom and to shake off the melancholy of newspaper pessimism ; and to associate ourselves with those whose lives are beautiful and kind and true is to acquire that healthful spirit of hope and enthusiasm without which no fruitful work can be done, no life really lived in the warmth and blessing of contented faith.

It is good to remind oneself when reading the newspaper that millions of people love their gardens more than the tavern, that the innocent pleasures and refining occupations of life are more in number than its much-advertised iniquities, and that the love of home, delight in children, and devotion to books, music, and pleasant games are still the mainspring of our national life. But, better still is it to go into the world and see for ourselves how innumerable is the host of those who live for others, and how manifold, unceasing, and miraculous are the activities of religious faith.

Let me say to those whose existence is narrowed by circumstance, and whose notions of the world are taken from the newspaper, that the longer I live and the more I get to know of the miracles of

religious energy, the more do I marvel at men's pessimism and stand amazed before the confidence of infidelity.[1]

IV

This book attempts to tell the story of one single society working in the enormous field of Christian activity. It shows how a small seed planted in London sixty-seven years ago has struck its roots deeply into our national life, has spread its branches throughout every land in the British Empire, has sown itself in nearly every kingdom and republic of the civilised globe, and is now a force working for Anglo-Saxon unity, the peace of the world, and the elevation of mankind. Such an achievement in itself is something of a miracle, for the man who sowed the first insignificant seed was a humble clerk, almost friendless at the heart of the Empire; but when one studies the thing attentively, when one examines the ramifications and increasing energies of this quiet, unobtrusive, and almost silent society —above all, when one comes face to face with individuals composing it, and penetrates to the spiritual passion which inspires it—then with overwhelming force does the intense mystery of our

[1] As this book goes to press I make acquaintance for the first time with a most interesting and important work, The Christian Mission and Ragged School of Hoxton Market. For the past two years this little-known society of unselfish people has fed some 10,000 hungry children a week. It provides boots and clothing for thousands of children, helps the unemployed of Hoxton, and spreads its Christian influence over the whole of that struggling area. The Superintendent of this Mission is unpaid, has to work hard for his own living, and gives himself body and soul to the work with a quite splendid enthusiasm. Let the reader who is cynical or pessimistic pay a visit to Hoxton Market.

human life come home to the heart and the reality, the penetrating and suffusing reality of the religious life quicken every imagination of the soul. That such a work is meaningless no man in his senses dare affirm, and that it could have been done without faith in God is a thing impossible to believe.

And this is but one activity of our manifold religious life, but one society among thousands labouring for spiritual evolution, but one small regiment in the grand army of the central host which carries the fortunes of humanity.

> Can it be true, the news He is declaring?
> Oh, let us trust Him, for His words are fair:
> Man! what is this? and why art thou despairing?
> God shall forgive thee all save thy despair!

CHAPTER I

A MAN AND HIS WORK

IN the autumn of 1821—rather a savage and brutal period of English history—there was born in Ashway Farm, Dulverton, a child destined to spread the influence of his personality not only throughout the British Isles, not only throughout the British Empire, but throughout the whole world.

He was the youngest child of a stalwart yeoman named Amos Williams. His brothers were tall, stark, hard-riding men, vigorous with the winds and spaces of the moorland, somewhat barbarous with the roughness and struggle of their remote existence. Amos Williams himself was an excellent farmer, an energetic and go-ahead man who did not allow his love of hunting to interfere with his work in the fields. Elizabeth Williams, his wife, was a notable representative of refinement in that home with the beautiful name. She was the angel of Ashway Farm. Small, gentle, humorous, winsome, and sanguine, this little mother of a great man permeated the rough fibres of that Devonshire home-life with something sweet and gentle. She was for ever weaving into the sullen fabric of that existence threads of gold which transformed the

sternness of the pattern into something which suggested beauty, and which was ultimately, in the life of her youngest child, to command the admiration of a great Queen, the reverence of nations, and the blessing of humanity.

This youngest son, George Williams, bore no resemblance to his brothers. He was diminutive; he was highly strung; he was sensitive and gentle. But whereas the tall brothers were dour men, silent and stern except in moments of exhilaration, the little Benjamin of the house was for ever and irrepressibly bright and vivacious, was overflowing with high spirits, was fond of singing, and in all his wits was as sharp and vital as his brothers were serious and stern. Americans would have called him "quick in the uptake."

He went to Dulverton Church and heard a great many sermons and listened to a great many prayers which made no impression on his mind and contributed not the smallest influence to his spiritual development. He went to a dame-school, and picked up with average ease the elements of learning. He drove his father's sheep to the moors, and contracted the habit of swearing. He chaffed his sterner brothers, but they did not resent his frivolities. He tried on one occasion to lead a waggon-load of hay from the meadows, and a rut, unobserved by the inattentive boy, overturned both waggon and horses. The brothers mourned for him! It was agreed on all hands that baby George would never make a farmer. The overturning of the waggon pitched the lively boy into a shop. His father drove him one day

from the farmyard, and deposited him as apprentice with Mr. Holmes, draper, of Bridgwater, there to shift for himself.

As a rule the youth from a country village makes his first experience of evil in the town to which he goes to earn his living. On the contrary in this case, the little George Williams, careless of anything in the nature of religion and given to swearing, made his acquaintance with spiritual life in the shop of a Bridgwater draper. There were two other apprentices in this business, and both of them were serious lads. Their conversation, their manner of life, the whole set and purpose of their characters came to the farmer's son as a great awakening. He became vividly aware of another world penetrating and interpenetrating the world of sense, a world of which he had scarcely begun to dream. His master was a Congregationalist, and insisted that his apprentices should attend chapel. The early spirit of Methodism was abroad, and in the Bridgwater chapel little George Williams heard sermons which deepened the influence made upon his soul by the conversation of the other apprentices. He saw that infinity separated good from evil. He became sharply sensible of the great issues of character. He visualised the two great roads on which every man that lives must make his journey to Eternity. He felt in the deepest recesses of his soul the immense separation of sin and the exquisite unifying force of love. "I now began to pray," he said, "but even on my knees oaths would come to my lips."

A sermon in chapel determined his life. There is

here nothing of cataclysm or traceable upheaval. It is a case of one who had begun to seek, one who had already detected the great difference between good and evil, quietly but with an iron decision turning the direction of his inward life away from selfishness, vanity, and evil, towards love, beauty, and God. There as he sat and listened to an unrecorded sermon by a preacher whose very name is probably forgotten, the youth in a back pew of the chapel just simply turned his face to God and decided for righteousness. He said of that time :—

> "I learnt at Bridgwater to see the vital difference, the tremendous importance, of the spiritual life. I saw in this town two roads—the downward road and the upward road. I began to reason, and said to myself, 'What if I continue along this downward road, where shall I get to, where is the end of it, what will become of me?' Thank God! I had kept in the clean path; nevertheless I was on the downward road."

After the service he returned to the shop, knelt down behind the counter, and, in a phrase sometimes ill-used but too marvellous and beautiful in the history of mankind ever to become false or meaningless, gave his heart to God. "I cannot describe to you," he said, "the joy and peace which flowed into my soul when first I saw that the Lord Jesus had died for my sins, and that they were all forgiven."

Uncertainty had come to an end. Darkness had rolled away. Henceforth he saw a straight road, a definite destiny, and a great light streaming from the kingdoms of invisible beauty.

At the age of nineteen, the days of his apprenticeship over, George Williams was taken up to London and presented to Mr. Hitchcock, head of a great firm of drapers on Ludgate Hill. The mighty man looked at the slender youth, adjudged him poor stuff, and said, "No! I've no place for him. He's too small." Nelson's reception into the Navy was not colder or more heart-breaking. The brother who had brought George Williams to London said that "though there might be little of him it was very good." Mr. Hitchcock considered, and bade the youth come again next day. "Well," he said, on this second view, "you seem a healthy young fellow. I will give you a trial."

That which follows is like a spiritualised version of Dick Whittington, is certainly one of the most wonderful, picturesque, and romantic stories in modern records of humanity. Beyond everything else, it is as striking and as incontrovertible a proof of the Miracle as anything in the biographies of mysticism.

George Williams found himself in that great warehouse on Ludgate Hill, one among a host of young men whose lives for the most part were as low and vulgar as it is possible to conceive. They must not be judged. From early morning to late at night they toiled like slaves; it is said that half an hour in the day sufficed for the three beggarly meals provided by the firm; and beyond the work of the day and the crowded, frightful dormitory—two men occupying in many cases a single bed—there was nothing but the street.

Horrified by what he saw and heard, George

Williams looked about him for at least one or two virtuous men with whom he might share his spiritual life in this crowded scene of materialism. It was with him from the very first a certainty of God that the spiritual life is to be *shared*. He had nothing in his eager blood of the cloister, nothing in his burning soul of the hermit and fakir. To associate with men who loved the Way, whose hearts were consecrated by the Truth, whose souls longed for ever greater indraughts of the Life, this was the peculiar genius of his spirit and the definite achievement of his great career.

When he had found the two or three, they gathered themselves together and prayed. Perhaps the most interesting element in the story of this man's extraordinary life is his concept of prayer. He believed with implicit faith in the power of prayer, he had no shadow of doubt in his soul that prayer reached to God and returned in quiet blessing to the earth; but he also believed that prayer should be sent not loosely nor aimlessly into the vastness of infinity, but should have for its objective some definite mark here upon earth. He believed in praying for individuals.

Whatever some men may be disposed to think of this idea, the facts are plain, the results are indisputable. It will really not do for the superior person to scoff or for the indulgent man to smile. George Williams prayed for particular men, the most unlikely and hardened men, and their lives became transformed. He set his little company of faithful friends to pray for other men, again the most unlikely and hardened men, and their lives

were transformed. Miracles occurred in that warehouse on Ludgate Hill as wonderful and as indisputable as any natural law in the physical kingdom. A man may be unwilling to believe this affirmation, but he cannot refute the testimony. He may desire to ignore the fact, but to this day it stares him in the face throughout the civilised globe.

"It was said in after years," writes Mr. J. E. Hodder Williams,[1] "that when he joined Messrs. Hitchcock and Rogers it was almost impossible for a young man in the house to be a Christian, and that, three years afterwards, it was almost impossible to be anything else."

Let it be remembered, we have overwhelming evidence for the truth of a contemporary assertion that in that period of our history "there was no class more degraded and dissolute, none who were sunk deeper in ungodliness and dissipation than the shopmen of London."

George Williams, we are told, on finding himself one among a host of low, vulgar, indifferent, and depraved young men, immediately singled them out, one by one, and prayed for them individually, day after day, night after night, in the dormitory where life was brought almost as near to perdition as it can go on earth.

One of the worst men in the house was a gay and uproarious person named Rogers. He was the presiding genius of smoking concerts at a public-house in the neighbourhood, and was so antipathetic to the beautiful in life that he deliberately set

[1] *The Life of Sir George Williams*, by J. E. Hodder Williams. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

himself to prevent men from coming under the influence of religion. Above all others in that establishment he was the champion of existing materialism, the avowed enemy of a threatening religiousness. George Williams immediately marked him out as the Saul of that little warehouse world, the Saul who must be changed, by the grace of God, into the Paul of the new life.

This man was first softened by the tact and pleasantness of George Williams, was then moved to attend the meetings of the two or three, grew concerned for the health of his spiritual life, and finally became one of them—one of the twelve who, in an upper room in a warehouse by St. Paul's Cathedral, laid the foundations of a Brotherhood which now covers the whole earth. "By a curious coincidence," says Mr. Hodder Williams, "his is the only one of the twelve cards of membership which has been preserved." George Williams said to a friend some few days before this notable event, "I was praying for him this morning until it seemed as if I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, '*Yes*'; and I knew he would be converted."

It was the fixed opinion of George Williams that *the first twenty-four hours of a young man's life in London usually settled his eternity in heaven or hell.* With such a passionate conviction in his soul he could not rest content with one, two, three, four, and five conversions among his fellow-clerks. He sought to change the whole spirit of the establishment. To do this it was necessary to convert the master, the gruff and vigorous rich man who sat in his counting-house and directed every energy of

that great machine with the resolution of a most masterful dictator.

George Williams, without a single misgiving, began to pray for the soul of George Hitchcock. He was at this time high up in the firm's service, a valuable servant, an industrious worker, not only one who could be trusted and relied upon, but one whose talent for the trade added handsomely to the firm's profits. When it came to the ears of the master that this youth from Devonshire was praying for him, that in one of the bedrooms of the establishment four or five of his servants met every night and actually prayed for his soul, he was filled with amazement, was staggered, was angry, and sent for George Williams into his presence.

It is well for the reader to remind himself that this narrative is no romance, that George Hitchcock, of Ludgate Hill, was no character in a novel, but actual flesh and blood, one of the great master merchants of the City of London. When I was in his warehouse the other day, and looked through the glass partition and saw the clerks at their desks, the cashier in his box, and the coming and going of many people through the swing-doors opening on the street, I thought of old Osborne of *Vanity Fair*, of young George coming to borrow money from Mr. Chopper, of the Family Bible in Russell Square, and of the old merchant in his broken age going home from the City to see the little George Osborne riding on his pony in Regent's Park.

But this story is a true story, and it is many times more wonderful.

George Williams stood in front of his master.

"Is it true," demanded Mr. Hitchcock, "this tale I hear about you, that you are *praying for my soul?*"

George Williams was startled, but he faced his master and said, "Yes, sir, it is true."

Hitchcock measured him with stern eyes, measured the little man of whom he had said not many years ago, "He's too small." Perhaps he now seemed bigger than he had thought.

After a pause he asked, "You pray for my conversion?"

"Yes, sir."

"You think I need conversion?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you aware that I am a churchwarden?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you do not think I am converted?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

The quick, challenging question was opportunity with a golden key. George Williams opened his heart. He told his master many terrible truths about the business. He spoke eloquently of the tainted moral atmosphere. He brought home to the heart and soul of the rich man his frightful responsibility towards those who served him. He magnified nothing, but he spared nothing. He told the truth, and that sufficed.

Hitchcock heard him out.

"You can go," he said; "but continue your prayers for me."

In a few days the man's life was transformed. He came publicly into the office one day and

announced certain momentous changes in the conduct of the business. He gave his influence to the spiritual work of George Williams. He set himself to purify his house from the top to the bottom.

The work flourished, but George Williams was not satisfied. He thought of the thousands of young men pouring into London from the provinces, thousands of pure and innocent lives for whom the City waited like a hungry lion, thousands of men inexpressibly dear to their parents, inexpressibly precious to England, inexpressibly dear and precious to God. They came to London, many of them, upright, chivalrous, manly, industrious, honourable, and, in some cases, dreaming dreams. And London had nothing for them but foul dormitories, heart-breaking hours of labour, the companionship of debased and brutalised minds, the excitements of the tavern, the perils of the street, the hell of disenchantment and despair. Could nothing be done for them ?—nothing to save them ?—nothing to develop and uplift them ?

One day he was crossing Blackfriars Bridge with a fellow-worker named Edward Valentine. The great warehouses rose above moored barges on either side of the broad river, dark, smoky, and forbidding against the sunlight of a spring evening. The gentleness of the sky was black with spires, towers, roofs, chimneys, and congregating stone. Crowds of people and crowds of vehicles passed to and fro. The sense of humanity which comes to us in a great city was merged into the beauty of the sky, the width of the river, and the peace of a Sunday

twilight. With the stir of feet and the turning of wheels came the sound of bells. Between the arches of the bridge the most human river in the world flowed towards the sea. Afar to the west, in a haze of smoke and mist, the sun was almost level with the roofs. It was one of those scenes, one of those moments when the stress of material existence sets no darkness between the soul and its destiny, when life, real life, is felt to lie deep within the silence of our invisible being.

The sweetest thought in the unfathomable depths of his heart rose to the lips of George Williams. He took the arm of his friend, and asked him if he was prepared to make a great sacrifice for Christ. The friend, Edward Valentine, replied, "If called upon to do so, I hope and trust I can." They had been very silent up to this point, each man lost in his own reverie. But now George Williams became eloquent. He told his dream for the first time.

And this was the dream. To spread into every large establishment throughout the City of London the same spirit of profound religion which had now begun to move in the warehouse on Ludgate Hill, a spirit of prayer, a spirit of love, a spirit of service, so that the whole trade of London might one day be associated in worship of God and devotion to the life of Christ, so that no single soul might be lost to the eternal truth of existence save those who definitely elected for evil.

He said he felt himself persuaded that if a few earnest, devoted, and self-denying men could be found to unite themselves for this purpose, the work could be accomplished. It would mean hard,

incessant work. It would mean an absolute self-sacrifice. It would mean a lifelong service. But it could be done, with God's blessing.

Edward Valentine said that he agreed.

And this was the beginning of the great Brotherhood.

From that moment when he gave the first utterance to his thought, George Williams lost not a single day till the end of his long life in toiling for its realisation and its greater power for righteousness. From that moment on Blackfriars Bridge to the other moment in Devonshire when he passed to the invisible and eternally beautiful murmuring the words " Beloved young men ! " the whole life of this man was consecrated to the still greater glory of his idea, which, even in the vigour of his own lifetime, had passed into every region of our Empire, and into every country of the civilised world.

A circular was sent out to all the chief drapery establishments at both ends of the town ; satisfactory answers were received ; a meeting was decided upon ; a society was formed ; and the Young Men's Christian Association came into being.

In the chapter which follows I shall trace briefly the fortunes of this Association from its humble beginnings in 1844 down to the present day, when it is recognised by America, by Canada, by Australasia as a force of tremendous importance in the national life, and when it seems as if it is about to enter on an even more vigorous existence in the home and city of its birth.

For the present I would tell the reader the rest of George Williams's story, so far as its many and

strange events can be compressed into a few words of narrative.

George Hitchcock's health gave way in the year 1863; his wife consulted the family solicitor as to the future of the business; the solicitor's advice resolved itself into a phrase. He said, "Take young George Williams into partnership."

The little boy from a Devonshire farm became a partner in one of the world's greatest business houses. At the age of thirty-two he married the daughter of his former master, Helen Hitchcock, whose life was given with an impulse of the most earnest and enthusiastic devotion to the great charitable purposes of her husband. From that moment everything prospered with our Dick Whittington. But blessed with enormous and increasing wealth, he lived not merely frugally, but parsimoniously, ordering the lives even of his children, whom he adored, with a rigorous regard to economy, in order, as he told them with a pleasant smile, that they might have more money to give away. He was a man of whom it may be said with entire truth, and not merely as a convenient phrase for expressing a lavish generosity, that he never thought of himself. His wealth was his opportunity to help others; his time was only his own that he might devote it to his fellow-creatures; his energies, his faculties, his enthusiasms, and his strength of soul and body belonged to God.

When, on the occasion of the Association's Jubilee, Queen Victoria made him a knight, he accepted the honour, not for himself, but for the object of his life. It was to make the Association

better known in England and throughout the world that he laboured from morning till night, and thought, and prayed, and lived with all the splendid courage and determination of his royal character.

It must not be supposed that he devoted himself exclusively to the Association which he himself had called into being. This had the first affection of his heart, and the first call on his sympathy ; but he gave himself with extraordinary energy and a most earnest devotion to many other agencies for good—some of which sprang from the loins of the Association. At the time of his death he was president of thirty-nine societies. How he contrived to support the tax upon his physical powers it is difficult to imagine. He was no decorative president or figure-head of philanthropy, and no sleeping partner in the warehouse of his gigantic business. And in addition to all this work there was the labour of a private correspondence sufficient to break the strength of an ordinary man. Letters rained upon him from all quarters of the world, and not only from men of one class, but from every class in the community. No one will ever know—for his son burned all his correspondence and will disclose no secrets—how many men, from the highest to the lowest, George Williams rescued from ruin, lifted from despair, and strove to direct to God. On the day that followed the announcement of his death over ten thousand letters of sympathy, many of them expressing a most heartfelt gratitude for help he had given to the writers, were received by Lady Williams and her sons. For several months a staff of clerks was employed acknowledging the

letters which continued to pour upon his family from every quarter of the world.

One who knew him well, quite well, said to me, "He was not really a very first-rate man of business. Clever, industrious, courageous, and far-seeing, yes; but not a mighty organiser and pioneer. His genius lay in this, that he saw the folly of doing ten men's work himself, and got the *right* ten men to do his own work. His knowledge of human character, his judgment of a man was almost infallible. He seemed to read a man's heart in a glance of his eyes. I don't know that he was ever once mistaken in the men he chose for directing his business."

That he was a pioneer in humanitarianism one need not trouble to argue. It is enough to state, what is perhaps not widely known, that the great Early Closing Movement sprang from his brain, that he set it going in his own house against all the warnings and protests of business men, and went to America and initiated it there. He was told it meant ruin to his firm, that no one would follow his example, and that he would be laughed to scorn by the traders of the whole world. But the man smiled at these solemn words. "You will see," he retorted, "that the thing will become general and universal. It is the right thing, and therefore it is the wise thing." He never once regarded righteousness as a foolish or dangerous speculation. His rational mind, with its shrewd judgments and shining humour, saw that righteousness was but spiritual common sense. He did nothing for the sake of money, but what he did brought money and increased prosperity.

One likes to think that every clerk and shopman, from those employed in the greatest banks down to those who slave in a little draper's shop, every one of the vast army of employed citizens *throughout the whole world* owe their Saturday afternoons and their week-day hours of leisure, in the first instance, to the little son of a Devonshire yeoman who began his life by spilling a cart of hay.

"You must be careful to remember," one of his friends told me, "that George Williams, in spite of his theology, was one of the brightest and happiest men alive. I do not think I ever met a man so contagiously cheerful. It was splendid to see him enter a hall where a great meeting was expected, and where perhaps only a dozen people were congregated; his eyes would shine, his lips break into a smile, and, rubbing his hands, he would exclaim, 'This is splendid! We can have a real talk!' I may truly say that I never once saw his face fall, or once knew him dejected or disappointed. He was the noblest optimist that ever gave himself to humanity. And I need not tell you what was the secret. His faith was that of a little child. God, for him, was a Father, a living and a most loving Father. He knew that so long as he worked his hardest, prayed with all his heart, and really believed, God Himself, in some way and at some time, would give the increase."

He was a man who spoke jerkily, walked jerkily, and made all his movements jerkily. He was one of those electric personalities which break up stagnation in a wide radius of their contact, and set the dullest torpor into motion. No man could

easily yawn in his presence. He had the most benign smile, the most contagious twinkle of the eyes, and the most lovable way of saying kind or stimulating things. On occasions he could be sharply amusing. One of his friends, a fat and comfortable person, once said to him, very lugubriously, "I'm ill, seriously ill. I don't know what to do. My doctor says I must take care of myself. What would you advise me to do?" "Change your doctor," was the answer.

Men of all nations and the most various occupations entertained towards him a feeling of the very warmest, almost a filial affection. At the time of the Association's jubilee in America, Mr. Pierpont Morgan, Mr. Rockefeller, and Mr. Dodge happened to be breakfasting together in America. It was suggested that they should send "the dear old man" a cable of congratulations. The message was composed, and was about to be despatched when Mr. Morgan, who is a better and kinder Christian than many people suppose, exclaimed with a note of rebuke in his voice, "But stop a minute! Anyone can send a telegram. Surely we ought to do something to show our appreciation and affection." The others agreed. After a few minutes it was decided to ascertain from the Central Office of the Young Men's Christian Association in America the extent of its debts and liabilities. This was done by telephone. The sum was wiped out then and there, and a few words were added to the original cable, saying that the Association in New York was now clear of debt.

Another instance. One day a poor widow called

upon Sir George Williams begging his assistance in a great tragedy. Her son had run away from home. The good man, to whom the widow was a complete stranger, gave himself up to help her. It was discovered that the boy had taken service in a ship bound for America. George Williams at once sent a cablegram to a friend of his in Philadelphia, the millionaire John Wanamaker, asking him to have the boy met, reasoned with, and sent back to England. When the ship arrived Mr. Wanamaker himself was there to meet it; he carried off the boy to his own house, entertained him, and sent him back to England with his love to George Williams. No man could ever do too much for this noble spirit.

But of all the men who knew him and felt for him this warmth of affection, none, of course, ever got nearer to his heart, or more perfectly appreciated the man's depth of soul, than his son, Mr. Howard Williams. To most people Mr. Williams is known chiefly as treasurer to perhaps the wisest charity in England, Dr. Barnardo's Homes, although very few people are aware to what extent he has given himself, heart and soul, to that great business of saving children and making citizens. But Mr. Williams is also one of the great forces at the back of the Young Men's Christian Association, and not only because he believes in the work, and not only because he sees that the room for its development is enormous, but because of his father's memory.

It is impossible for me to relate here what Mr. Williams told me of his father's life, still more impossible to convey the tone of affection in his

voice, the light of love and devotion in his eyes, as he spoke of that great and remarkable man. One saw that the impression made by the father on the son's heart was as deep and everlasting as the effect of a great revelation or the memory of a profound beauty. "We believe and hold," he said, speaking of the Association and its developments, "the faith my father taught us. First, that the most important thing in life is Character; second, that without Christ the perfection of Character is impossible; and third, that the way of approach to Christ is by prayer and reading of the Bible. That was the foundational thing in my father's soul. That was the inspiration of his life. And it is the foundational fact of the Association. The Association will grow in England as it has grown in the United States, in Canada, and in Australia. It will change as everything changes in time. It will certainly march forward and enlarge its vision. But it will always have as the rock of its foundation those three dogmas of my father's life: Character; Character through Christ; Christ through prayer and reading of the Bible. And I don't believe any good and lasting work can be done in the world where those three foundational things are absent, or, if present, weak and unemphatic. My father made religion the base of the Association and the base of his own life. His motto was, *First things first.*"

On the 14th November, 1905, under darkened heavens, and in sullen falling rain, the people of London stood in the shuttered streets, stood in the midst of the arrested traffic, and watched the passing of the body of George Williams to St. Paul's

Cathedral. In the almost unnatural gloom of the wintry afternoon letters in white flowers on a background of violets, shining from a wreath at the back of the hearse, were visible to every eye—the one utterance, the one intelligible sound in that dumb and solemn progress of the dead. These words were, "Loved by all."

That simple epitaph, spoken by white flowers, moved through the hush of London like the deep Amen of angels at the end of a beautiful life. No spot of rain seemed to dull those shining flowers, no speck of London's mud besmirched their purity. Through the sombre gloom, close at the head of the dead man, those letters shone to right and left of the darkened streets, and breathed a sense of tenderest humanity and sweetest divinity on a great and mighty City whose iron pulses beat to the ends of the earth. Just those words, woven by the hands and hearts of the dead man's staff in his house of business, and the rest, silence and the turning of wheels.

Without pomp or pageantry of any kind, the gentle, sweet-hearted, and courageous man was borne from the streets of the great City and laid to rest close to the place of Nelson's burial. Like Nelson, he had begun his life in delicacy and in ridicule, and like Nelson, but with even a more universal blessing, he was laid to rest at the heart of the British Empire.

CHAPTER II

THE WORK

ON Midsummer Day in the year 1844 a meeting was held in St. Martin's Coffee House, to report upon the result of the circular sent out to the big drapery establishments in London, suggesting the formation of a society for young men on religious lines. George Williams presided at this meeting, announced that the answers to the circular were encouraging, and a sum of thirty shillings was raised towards expenses.

In a few weeks, so successful was the undertaking, larger premises were needed, and a room was taken in Radley's Hotel, Blackfriars, at a rental of seven shillings and sixpence a week — "an increased expenditure which seemed to many almost too daring a venture!"

"The first months of the Association's existence," says Mr. Hodder Williams, "were marked by many signs of steady progress. Religious services were established in fourteen other houses of business, while weekly meetings were held at Radley's Hotel, 'from which gatherings the members of the Association separated to their various places of business strengthened and cheered by such fellowship for the difficult task of keeping their flag flying in dor-

mitory, shop, and warehouse.' The members were increasing constantly, and fresh conversions were announced at every meeting. . . . It must not be forgotten that the work began as an association of Christian young men, young men full, it is true, of missionary zeal, but anxious, first of all, so to strengthen each other by this bond of companionship that they might, by their united stand, show a bold front against the forces of evil which threatened to overcome the weaker brethren."

Thus, as little else but a society for prayer and Bible reading, the Association grew rapidly in the metropolis, and became presently a society for "mental culture," without losing its essential spirit of religion. Before it was five months old as many as 160 men attended to hear the reading of the first reports. Lectures were delivered by such distinguished men as Archbishop Whately, Dean Stanley, and Professor Richard Owen on a variety of subjects which ranged "from the Tabernacle of Israel to the Mythology of the Greeks, from Renan to Hogarth, and from Christian Evidences to Popular Amusements." Nearly three thousand people attended some of these lectures.

The great masters of trade and commerce gave warm encouragement to this prospering society. "It is no exaggeration to say that the platform at the yearly gatherings of the Young Men's Christian Association . . . was occupied by more notable men from all sections of society than were to be found at any other public gathering of a religious nature. . . . The most noble of all names connected with the Association will ever remain that of the

heroic philanthropist and statesman, Lord Shaftesbury. It was in 1848, when, as Lord Ashley, he had reached the height of his power in the House of Commons . . . that he first came into close personal touch with George Williams. . . . The complete story of their friendship will never be told. George Williams would not have wished the details of such a relationship to be made public, and silence is the golden tribute to both men. It is enough to say that one of the finest, strongest characters of these latter days spoke of Sir George Williams as his 'best friend,' and asked repeatedly for him as he lay waiting for Death." In the estimation of Lord Shaftesbury the Association was a "valuable institution set for the glory of God and the good of men."

But it was not all plain sailing. To George Williams it became every day more evident that the Association must open ever wider gates to the increasing host of young men exposed to the loneliness and temptations of London. He was broad-minded, tolerant, far-seeing, and tender-hearted. He had an infinite compassion for young men surrounded on every side by the bewitchments of evil. He would have done almost anything, short of renouncing the religious basis of the Association, to draw all men into its fold. But he was opposed by the timorous, the intolerant, and the narrow-minded. It was not until after a great fight that the Association, as a body, recognised the importance of what Herbert Spencer called "physical morality" and the necessity for greater activity in the region of mental refinement.

Mr. Hodder Williams quotes in his biography of Sir George Williams what he truly calls "two amazing extracts" from the official organ of the Association :—

> "We have no hesitation in saying that a Christian young man had better not compete in a swimming match, or indeed in a match of any kind. The desire of distinction will in itself be a snare, while if he should win in the strife, passions of envy, jealousy, or disappointment may be engendered in his competitors."

A few days later Archbishop Trench and Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, for attending some Shakespearean celebration, were accused of having "trailed their Christian priesthood in the dust to offer homage at the shrine of a dead playwright" :—

> "We see that Archbishop Trench closed his discourse at Stratford Church by referring to the correctness of Shakespeare's views on the corruptness of human nature and on the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Did he think such matters were of much account to those who were about to join in idle pageants, theatrical fooleries, and, above all, that oratorio of the *Messiah*, wherein, as John Newton once said roughly but pointedly, 'the Redeemer's agonies are illustrated on catgut'? Masquerade and sermon, pageant and oratorio! — it is very mournful."

Thoughtful and reflective people, acquainted with the spirit of that age, will be able to find some excuse

for these pious opinions; but the great, coarse, hurrying world, so quick with sneers for what is pure and refined, hears of them gladly and with chuckles, only eager for an opportunity to laugh at goodness and to ridicule the life of the righteous.

In spite of noble men who fought manfully in the Association against this pitiful spirit of a quite pinchbeck puritanism, a certain section of society passed contemptuous judgment on its work and made its members the target of their scorn. The letters "Y.M.C.A." began to figure in comic prints with the accompaniment of derision. A young man who hated to be dubbed "milksop" held aloof from its gatherings. There was a fairly general feeling that the Association existed for the manufacture of prigs.

Deadly as was this impression, George Williams, and the best of the men supporting him, went manfully forward with the great work, and continued to win young men by hundreds and thousands. The Association became more manful and vigorous, more intellectual and refined. Local branches were established throughout the country. They were recognised by Church and commerce as beneficent institutions. In spite of narrowness within, and ridicule without, the Association prospered.

In the year 1852 George Williams was in Paris on the business of his house. He asked a pastor if a Young Men's Christian Association existed in the city. He was told that such a society did not and could not exist in that city. Not satisfied by this answer, George Williams called a meeting, opened a subscription list, and established the first foreign

branch of the Association in the City of Paris. A commercial traveller, present at this meeting, introduced the Association into Holland, from whence it spread to other European countries. "In the same year Richard Searle, a young man from a business house in London, laid the foundation of a flourishing Association in Adelaide, and shortly afterwards branches were also started in Calcutta, in Montreal, in Boston, and in other cities in the United States." The Association had become within eight years of its foundation—when twelve young men prayed for it in a dingy little upper room in St. Paul's Churchyard—imperial and international.

At this day the Association claims to be "the greatest Brotherhood in the world—from humble beginnings in 1844 of twelve young men, with the modest expenditure for rent of 2s. 6d. weekly, it has so multiplied itself that to-day there are upwards of 8000 branches in 46 countries, with a membership of nearly one million, some 1300 Associations possessing their own buildings, valued at sixteen million pounds."

Now, it must be confessed that if England can give praise for the birth of this wonderful Brotherhood at the heart of her kingdom, America is the country which can most justly claim the chief glory of its present prosperity. For what England began to do timorously and on a rather niggardly scale, America has done boldly, whole-heartedly, and on a scale of confident magnificence. England is now about to make up for lost time, is now about to recover her lost ground, and it is possible—for so

great is the newly awakened enthusiasm—that she may even rival and surpass America. But it is only fair and right to say that the extraordinary genius of the American nation for realising a good thing, for appreciating a splendid opportunity, and for sparing neither money nor energy in a really great undertaking, is the inspiration of the present enthusiasm in England.

One of the foremost workers for the Association in America said to me the other day: "I could almost have cried when I first came to England and saw how the Association had fallen to sleep. I went to a provincial city. It was evening when I arrived. The streets were crowded with people. I asked the first man I saw to direct me to the Young Men's Christian Association. He didn't know it! I asked another, and another, and at last I found someone to tell me. It was down a back street. The door stood open. In a dark passage two or three dirty bicycles leaned against the wall. I went upstairs. A kerosene lamp was burning in a dull and stuffy room. A few old papers lay on the table. Not a sound was to be heard. The room was empty. The whole house seemed to be deserted. Well, as I tell you, I could have cried. Why! in America, in a city of that size, the finest and most prominent building in the whole place would be the Young Men's Christian Association. Not a soul there but would know it. It would be the chief landmark, and the centre of the town's social and religious life. Yes, it is high time you woke up in England."

America has seen the immense possibilities of this Association. Not a whit less insistent than England

as to the religious basis, it has developed the moral, mental, and physical view-points of the Association on a really gigantic scale. The buildings, vast and utilitarian buildings, are hives of energy. Education proceeds in numerous class-rooms on almost every subject under the sun, from theology to chemistry ; a physical director is kept hard at work with squads of athletes in the gymnasium ; there are swimming-baths, shower-baths, fives-courts, running-tracks, and rifle ranges ; billiard-rooms, and music-rooms are provided on a handsome scale ; nothing innocent and healthy is excluded from one of these huge clubs, where classes for study of the Bible are not less well attended than the gymnasium and the swimming-bath.

But the reader will learn in a subsequent chapter of this book how entirely England has been outpaced by America in the matter of developing Sir George Williams's great idea of associating young men in a society for religious and intellectual improvement. For the present I would attempt to show how wide and considerable is the influence for good exercised by the Association in England even in its present condition, and how stimulating and boundless are the possibilities now presented to our vision in the awakening of this English Association to the immense field of action which literally clamours for its activity.

The influence of the Association has long permeated our commercial life. Just as the early-closing movement, now universal, owes its success to the brilliant thought and courageous energy of the Association's founder, so does the provision

now made in most of the big business houses for the comfort and well-being of their servants have its spring and origin in the example of the Association. The indirect influence of this Brotherhood, the more one studies its history and the concurrent history of the nation's trade, is seen to be amazing. One might almost say that the humanitarian spirit which now characterises so many of the largest shops and warehouses and factories of England had its sole birth in the quickening impulse of the Young Men's Christian Association.

Perhaps the general public is not aware of the religious spirit which works behind the scenes of material commerce, the religious spirit which is busy with the souls of men even in the midst of London's ceaseless trade. It may be well, therefore, if I give a brief account of the inner life of one establishment in London, where a most prosperous religious activity keeps pace with an increasingly successful trade, where the whole immense volume of material activity is consecrated by a spiritual influence. In this particular case the entire character of the religious life is directly due, not indirectly traceable, to the work of the Young Men's Christian Association.

To begin with, all the young people employed by this firm, if they have no relations in London, are, with very few exceptions, boarded and housed in lodges of a most comfortable order. These lodges contain from thirty to sixty individuals, who are subjected to the same rules that obtain at universities, with the exception that they are allowed to go out at night until 11.15 and, for one

night a week, until 12 o'clock. The dormitories and smaller bedrooms are comfortable and well ventilated ; the furniture is good ; the whole atmosphere is refined and civilising. In each lodge there are a room for games, a writing-room, a smoking-room, and a music-room.

The religious welfare of this great concern is superintended by a chaplain, who reads morning prayers every day of the week, and by a missionary society among the staff of the establishment. This society, which holds prayer meetings and Bible classes every week, held its seventy-first annual meeting last year, and for many years has contributed from £120 to £160 annually towards mission work.

The firm has its own sports ground. It has cricket, football, hockey, bowls, lawn tennis and other outdoor clubs. On the Saturday of the week in which I visited the establishment eight football and two hockey teams were engaged in matches. In addition to these sports and games, the firm possesses a miniature rifle-range ; and in order to teach its young people the duties of citizenship, and to encourage a national spirit, it gives an extra week's holiday on full pay every year to each man who becomes a Territorial and goes to camp.

A qualified medical man is employed to attend the sick, and no one loses wages through illness. Where a young man has no place to go to for recuperation, he is sent to a Convalescent Home at the firm's expense.

The social side of the firm's life is provided for by

a library committee, which arranges entertainments and lectures throughout the winter season, and by an Eclectic Association which provides for impromptu speeches, discussions, set debates, and lantern lectures. Draughts and chess clubs are popular, and a rambling club has devoted members who prefer long and philosophic walks to violent exercise in the form of athletics.

Educational work is steadily maintained throughout the autumn, the winter, and early spring. Classes are held for elocution, composition, French, singing, and even for ambulance work.

To encourage thrift, the members of the staff are allowed to deposit with the firm the savings of their salaries at 5 per cent interest. Coal and other clubs are arranged for the benefit of married men.

From this necessarily brief and hurried statement, the reader will perceive how very great is the change which has come over the commercial life of England since the formation of the Young Men's Christian Association. At that time uncarpeted and never-dusted rooms at the top of the warehouse served for dormitories; men slept two in a bed; half an hour served for the three wretched meals of the day; and in almost every single warehouse nothing was done either for the physical or moral welfare of the staff.

Three reflections will suggest themselves to the mind of a man who quietly considers the account I have just furnished of this firm's conscientious regard for the welfare of its staff. First, the miracle —the miracle that all this benefit has flowed from the thought of a youth who came from Devonshire

to London less than a hundred years ago in search of humble employment. No man can fail to be struck, if he patiently considers the immense change in public opinion, by the miracle of this single life, the life of a friendless and almost penniless youth, which by prayer and earnest faith in God became one of the very greatest powers in the evolution of the commercial conscience.

Second, the interest of modern life when we get behind the apparent and the exterior, and explore the inner workings of even that which appears at first sight an entirely material undertaking. Is it not interesting to reflect that within the grim and crowded warehouses of London there is an organised religious life permeating everything?—a life in which men seek to help each other, to be kind to one another, to improve and develop both their minds and bodies, to understand the evolving revelation of Almighty God, and to hasten the Kingdom of Christ by prayer and supplication. Does not this thought at once deepen and intensify our interest in life?—does it not draw us, as it were, a little closer to the heart of humanity?—are we not aware, as we reflect upon the spiritual life of a London warehouse, of some invisible, mystic, and overshadowing spirit which transcends the whole orb of physical existence as our own individual soul transcends the operations of the body?

And finally, the reflection arises that it is impossible to trace the beneficent influences which flow from the operations of organised goodness, and that to count heads in the Young Men's Christian Association, to number international branches, and

to estimate the capital value of their buildings, is by no means to exhaust the catalogue of blessings which have come to humanity from the idea of Sir George Williams.

From this final reflection emerges another thought. If the beneficent effect of the Young Men's Christian Association has been so general, and the establishment of which I have given an account is only one of many which now conduct their business with a genuine religious inspiration at the back of their machinery—is there any longer need of the Association as a separate and amalgamating institution?—has it not, by the force of its own influence, destroyed the reason for its existence?

The backward condition of the Association in England, as compared with America and Australasia, is due far more to this awakening of the moral conscience among the great London firms than to any previous narrowness on the part of its organisers. In a great measure one may say that the principal firms of London now offer their servants advantages and boons which are beyond the means of the Association to provide for its members. But the need for the Association has become even greater than before, and it is the realisation of this tremendous need that is now inspiring the devoted men at the head of the English Association to a great forward movement.

The reader will easily perceive that the need for the Association has increased rather than decreased with the philanthropic efforts of the great London firms, when it is pointed out that the very success of these large houses renders the struggle of the

small employer to keep head above water more and more difficult, so that it is wholly impossible for him to devote either time or money to the social and moral welfare of his servants. There are in London and throughout the provinces innumerable warehouses and factories where nothing of a saving character is done for the staff; and in addition to these small and struggling warehouses and factories there exist a vast number of offices in which it has never been the fashion of the employers to interest themselves in the moral and spiritual life of their clerks. To leave this huge army of young men, the great majority of whom live in lodgings—like beasts of the field, as Stevenson would say—to leave them with no provision for cultivating those mystic qualities which alone can give a logical interpretation to the fierce struggle for existence, to leave them entirely unguarded from the temptations of London streets, to leave them with nothing in life beyond the office desk and the back bedroom of a suburban lodging-house—this is to commit a most signal offence against the law of Christian brotherhood, and to leave undone one of the first and most urgent things every intelligent man should do, both as patriot and humanitarian. The young and lonely men of London are said to number 800,000—a host which exceeds the whole population of the next greatest city to the metropolis—and it is a wild thought that so vast an army can be adequately guarded from temptation by the philanthropic enterprise of a few of the largest firms—an enterprise entirely restricted, of course, to their own employés.

And the welfare of these young men is a matter of considerable importance even when religion is left out of count. For the most part they leave school and college, or come up from towns and villages in the country, with their innocence but little soiled, their tenderness and gentleness but little hardened. And they find themselves free and untrammelled—to all intents and purposes their own masters—in a city where gross, horrible, and revolting forms of vice are publicly paraded in the most fashionable and popular streets, and where the guardians of law and order look on as if this violation of purity and virtue were a thing of no account.

It is not only that quite young girls are there, publicly walking the streets, but that they are there *unashamed*. These young men from clean and virtuous homes see something far worse than vice ; they see, naked to their eyes, the immodesty of a fallen soul. They see vice laughing and triumphant. They see girls, who have thrown their very chastity away like a toy of childhood, walking the streets of the town without one sigh, without one tear, even without one blush. They are staggered. They are shocked. Their inmost soul revolts against this public desecration of virtue and modesty. But they are spellbound. They are fascinated. They become curious. And unless their souls are strong, they fall. They become one of the crowd that goes by, laughing and unashamed.

On every side of them are taverns, wine-bars, theatres, music-halls. A thousand doors to bright interiors stand open for them. The day has been long and hard. If they go home there is only a dull

bedroom, a gas-jet, and a grubby chair. Is it wonderful that they feel the magic of the streets, that they glance in at those open doors, that they are conscious of an inclination not to struggle any longer, no longer to aspire ?

The more I see of London the greater grows my amazement that there is so much virtue, goodness, sobriety among the youth of the city. For in London vice is not of the back street and among the disreputable, but in the very centre of the city's existence, and among the most splendid and fashionable of the inhabitants. In a village, in a small town, even in an average provincial city, vice has its own deplorable quarter, and its guilty votaries steal there, with fear of being observed. But in London the most central music-halls, the most central streets, the most central taverns are in the frank and challenging possession of iniquity. The men who crowd these places are not the shabby and disreputable, but apparently the prosperous, the fashionable, and the respectable. Vice is not a thing of which the city is ashamed, but apparently the very heart of its nightly pleasure. Sin is not a thing from which humanity is struggling to liberate itself, but apparently the single occupation of its leisure. Until a man has talked with a youth who came pure to London, he cannot know how terrible and destructive is the shock of London's public and triumphant shame.

Happily, such a Brotherhood as the Young Men's Christian Association exists to protect modesty, innocence, and purity—which the State leaves absolutely alone to shift for themselves—from the

carnival of the midnight streets. And still more happily, the Central Association in London has at length awakened to the necessity of a much more vigorous and splendid crusade against iniquity than anything which has hitherto been attempted. Great and wonderful work it has already accomplished—as the narratives that follow will help to show—but much greater and more wonderful confronts it now. I believe that with the active and generous support of London's wealthy citizens, the Association in England will become as potent a force for righteousness, as triumphant against vice and wickedness as the vigorous branches in America and Australia. That this is a very great claim to make, let the following incident suffice to prove.

At the time when the United States set about their gigantic task of cutting the Panama Canal, it was felt by the Cabinet that some provision should be made for the social and moral welfare of the 25,000 white men employed in the operations. The climate of the Panama Zone, the activity of the saloon-keepers, and the energy displayed by the agents of iniquity made it necessary for the State to interfere on the side of righteousness. Accordingly, great club-houses were erected at considerable cost, in which the white men were invited to take their ease and spend profitably the hours of their leisure. But the saloons remained full, the clubs were deserted. Then Mr. Roosevelt, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Association, suggested to his Cabinet that these houses, adequately financed by the State, should be handed over to the Young Men's Christian Association. Some misgiving,

I believe, was expressed as to the consequences of such a step—the jealousy of other organisations, the demands likely to be made on the State by missionary societies, etc.—but Mr. Roosevelt held to his course and carried the Cabinet with him. They all knew that the Association in America is "a real thing." And now those great buildings in the Panama Zone are crowded from base to roof with a strong and virile manhood, the saloons to all intents and purposes are deserted, the agents of iniquity have packed their bags and departed. Such is the force, the power, and the *irresistible efficiency* of the Association in America. And such, also, is its reputation with Government.

That a similar destiny awaits the Association in England one cannot doubt. For not only has a wholly adequate and really magnificent head-quarters at last been erected in London, but a hard-headed and sensible man likely to drive the Association forward by the force of his own ringing enthusiasm has been called from Australia to direct the new campaign, and is confident of victory. Mr. J. J. Virgo brings to the Mother Country the freshness, the energy, the courage, and the exuberance of spirit which as much characterise the Britons beyond the seas as the United States of America. He is a man whom neither our tragic snobbery can daunt, nor our ice-cold aversion from enthusiasm can chill. He knows what the Young Men's Christian Association is in Australia, in Canada, and in the United States; and, better still, he knows what has made it a recognised force in the national life of those coun-

tries. The same methods which he employed so successfully in Australia will be employed here, and unless the wealthy men of England are behind their kinsmen across the sea in patriotism, in humanity, and in a sense of responsibility to God, those methods will assuredly make the Association here a force of equal magnitude in the national life.

An orthodox Jew, in giving £10 to the palace now erected in Tottenham Court Road, as the Association's memorial to Sir George Williams, said that though he remained a Jew he should like to feel that he had helped to put a few bricks and a little mortar into so noble a factory for the making of Character. This is Mr. Virgo's central enthusiasm—the Association *makes men*. He feels that the making of Character is the greatest work to which a man can set his hand, and if he thought the Association manufactured prigs and milksops he would be the first man to laugh it out of our imperial existence. But he knows that this fault, if it ever existed in any considerable degree, has now entirely passed away. The Association stands for the development of the whole man—body, mind, and spirit. It exists to make men physically wholesome, mentally efficient, and spiritually strong. It does not develop only one side of a man's character, and leave the rest to shift for itself, to decay, to become corrupt, to atrophy. It holds that no one side can be developed alone without injury to the rest. And it holds the faith that the future of the race, and the future of the British Empire—which carries so much of the welfare of other nations—must depend upon the training of the young men throughout the whole

of the King's dominions in physical, mental, and spiritual efficiency.

In discussing this question with me for the first time, Mr. Virgo constantly made use of a single phrase which I have since found out is the spring of his optimism, if it is not the foundation of his enthusiasm. This phrase was, "The scope is boundless." While some people in England were inclined to say "We have come to the end of our furrow," this Australian was standing on a hill-top and perceiving with glad eyes that "the scope is boundless."

"When a man sees, really sees, without any mistake about it," he said to me, "that the scope of his work is boundless, absolutely boundless, he isn't likely to sit still whittling a stick. And it is boundless. Think what it means, first of all, from a national point of view. No one who is not out of his senses will deny that a sober, virtuous, and athletic people are essential to a nation's greatness. A nation cannot be great where young men are abandoned to intemperance, gambling, vice, and slothful lounging. The competition is too keen. The stress of life is too severe. The other fellow won't let you! An immoral nation goes under, sooner or later. But a nation, on the other hand, composed of vigorous, intelligent, healthy, and moral people—no matter how old its history or how enormous its heritage—stands, sure and steady, against every attack; nothing can destroy it. Ask an employer of labour whether he would rather have sober or drunken workpeople, whether he finds an earnest, athletic, and virtuous clerk more profitable than a little, white-faced, cynical ninny

or a lounging, lisping masher ! Ask the doctors, ask the eugenists ! But, of course, the thing is obvious. The only serious point of the matter is this, that the nation does not seem to realise, as a nation, how important, how essentially and tremendously important to its whole general welfare, is the morality and purity of its young people *at the start*. One does not seem to feel in England—at least I do not feel it at present—that the whole nation is convinced heart and soul of this importance. But what an England it will be—my word, what an England !—when the nation *does* realise that morality is its first concern, and does set itself, this great and splendid England, to the manufacture of men ! In that day you will not only get rid of the scandal of 'the remittance man,' so injurious to England throughout the colonies, but you will have in England itself a manhood worthy of the heart of the empire.

"Then, think what it means from an imperial point of view. What ties are the strongest ? Are they commercial ? Is a man more closely allied with his tradesmen than with those whom he loves, whether they serve him or not ? Surely affection is the strongest and most unifying of all human bonds. And what is the rock foundation of affection ? Is it not a moral enthusiasm, a fervour of religious idealism ? Throughout Australia and Canada you have an immense organisation linked to a similar organisation in England and waiting to develop itself on imperial lines. That organisation is religious. It is concerned with the manufacture of men. It desires above everything else to feel itself

at unity with a triumphant body in the Mother Country. It seeks to make the empire such a power as the world has never known—an empire of Christian manhood. A great awakening in England would be felt to the uttermost parts of this empire. It would quicken the whole fabric of British existence. For there is nothing like religious enthusiasm ; it does not matter how far off or how sundered our race may be, if they feel that they are one in religious spirit, that they are one in a sublime religious ideal, they will be a single people and a single nation. Responsibility ties us together ; enthusiasm for a great destiny makes us literally one people. Our scope is boundless.

" One of the big things which lie before the Association is the work of emigration. We seek to send more and more men from England to religious houses in the colonies, and to bring from the colonies into England some of the best and most go-ahead of their enthusiastic manhood. Again I say, the scope is boundless. England, I think, neither realises how deeply she is loved in the colonies, nor how earnest are the colonies for a religious unity with the Mother Country. Think what it will mean when the Young Men's Christian Association is the great central labour exchange of the whole empire, and when our conferences are held, with delegates from every nation, in all the countries of the British Commonwealth !

" There is one other point for England to consider. The most prosperous branch of the Association is in the United States and Canada. The prospect is not only imperial, but international. The ideal

before our eyes is one of Anglo-Saxon unity. Through the Association, more easily than any other agency, can this great unity of the race be achieved. America, according to some of your newspapers, is composed only of a greedy and grasping commercial people ; but in truth it is, I really believe, the most religious nation under heaven. The religious life in America has its aberrations and extravagances, but at bottom it is deep, manful, and enthusiastic with a most splendid common sense. If England desires the friendship of America, she will not leave the matter to her statesmen and diplomatists, but will herself propose a union for moral, philanthropic, and religious idealism. She cannot, in fact, too frequently remind America that the supreme object of her existence is the Kingdom of God, or too warmly invite the American nation to co-operate with her in achieving this ideal. And the Association, firm-fixed and universally extended throughout the States, is the best organisation for this cordial co-operation in a spiritual destiny. Yes, the scope is boundless. A moral, manful, and religious England linked up with a moral, manful, and religious empire is a great and glorious thought ; but greater and more glorious is the equally possible consummation of a moral, manful, and religious British Empire linked up with a moral, manful, and religious America for the peace of the world, the blessing of humanity, and the glory of God. It is not a dream ; it is an eminently practical possibility. Wherever an English member of the Young Men's Christian Association goes in the colonies or in America he makes straight for the

head-quarters of the Association, and there he finds not only kindness and hospitality, but a genuine eagerness to serve him in finding useful work. It is not a question of a foreign country, or a scattered empire ; he feels himself one of a consecrated Anglo-Saxon brotherhood."

The comprehensiveness of the Association is witnessed by the provision made in Tottenham Court Road for physical and mental culture. On the upper floors one sees an endless succession of class-rooms, where the young men of London will be able to get the very best instruction in every subject of commercial education. This is a branch of activity which the American Association has brought to the highest pitch of perfection. It was long ago recognised in America that mental efficiency is not only necessary to commercial success, but valuable to spiritual culture. The educational classes in America are perhaps the most flourishing department of the Association's work, and they are to be equally successful in England, if enthusiasm and thoroughness can make them so.

Just as an expert in education has been carefully chosen for the new London head-quarters, so an expert has been as carefully engaged for the Association's work in physical culture. The gymnasium will be a serious business, and not a mere playground for senseless antics and unprofitable tomfooleries. There will be regular courses of instruction, and classes for every form of drill and athletic exercise. In addition to the gymnasium, the head-quarters possesses a swimming-bath, shower-baths, a miniature rifle-range, and a room for fencing and boxing.

There are something like two hundred bedrooms in this beautiful building, where a young man can lodge as cheaply as three and sixpence a week. The restaurants are on a most elaborate scale. The cooking is to be as good as the money of the Association can make it.

Besides the usual attractions of a club, the Association provides a lecture theatre, a music-room, a wonderful range of dark-rooms for the developing of photographs, quiet rooms for private study, and a bureau of inquiry as regards emigration and employment.

But not less thorough is the organisation for entirely religious purposes. There are rooms set apart for the study of the Bible, and the best men possible will help in the work of directing religious enthusiasm into the most useful channels. A missionary earnestness will characterise the whole life of this vast establishment. Public meetings of a religious nature will be constantly held in the auditorium. Men from all the churches will compose the membership, and sectarianism will be entirely obliterated by the single and central ambition to make right reason and the Will of God prevail in the life of the metropolis.

To this great and noble condition has the Association now come in London, and before the closing of this chapter, and passing to some remarkable narratives of religious experience, I would invite the reader to consider the urgent need for multiplying such buildings as the London head-quarters throughout the capital city, the suburbs, and the provinces.

The very best safeguard for a young man's virtue and honesty is association with virtuous and honest men. Too poor to do anything but take a miserable room in a back street, and with little else to do in his spare time but wander aimlessly through the town, the average young man who comes to London for employment falls first into sin, then into a mood of bitterness and depression, and finally passes to a careless acquiescence in the general life of the irreligious community. Neither wholly good nor wholly bad, he drifts with the tide of indifference and becomes a feeble creature, as unprofitable to the State as useless to the purposes of God.

But such a young man, lodged and boarded in a splendid house, surrounded on every side by the bracing influences of morality, encouraged by those who share this club-life to develop his bodily powers, to educate himself as a rational being, and to address his imagination and the thoughts of his heart to the great God of the Universe, becomes a man to whom the streets offer no temptation, and one whose life may grow to be a blessing to his fellow-men. He is definitely associated with goodness; not solitary and aimless in the midst of a city loud with senseless pleasure and bold with shameless depravity. He is one in a moral army, a unit in a spiritual force, a comrade in a clean and rejoicing brotherhood. Such a lot is as certain for righteousness as the other is certain for ruin.

Now, this is the thought I would leave in the reader's mind. Young men do not usually go to their ruin with gladness and determinate purpose.

They *fall* into sin. And they do not keep away from the Young Men's Christian Association because they dislike and deny such an organisation, but because the Association has neither the room nor the equipment to receive them. If such a building as the head-quarters in Tottenham Court Road were erected twenty and thirty times in London, it would fill itself with a host of young men eager for its club-life, its educational and physical advantages, and the pleasures and refinements of its friendships. Such is the state of things in America. There is no reason in the world to imagine that such a state of things cannot exist in England.

If, then, young men perish for want of moral companionships, and if they are ready for such a life as the Association provides, ought we not to make it the immediate business of our Christian brotherhood to set up these hostels throughout the length and breadth of England?

Think how frightfully the solitary man is exposed to temptation in London! Can you expect him to go from his office or his warehouse to a little dingy villa in the suburbs or to a hole-and-corner habitation of the Young Men's Christian Association, as dark and melancholy and depressing as his own lodgings? There are some people who appear to think that when they have provided a young man with a back room, a Bible, and a text for the wall, it is his own deliberate fault if he goes with the crowd. But is this, indeed, our whole duty to the solitary and friendless young man at the most critical hour of his career? Are we quite certain that we have done for him all that God would have us do?

Have we shown him personal love and personal kindness ?

Even more than this, I venture to ask religious people whether they can say on their conscience that it would be wholly good for a young man employed all day in shop or factory to spend his evenings in a gas-lighted room reading the Bible or praying to God to save the world ? Is it not certain that such a man would become morbid, feeble, degenerate, and useless ? Is it not certain, on the other hand, that the more his muscles are braced by healthy exercise, the more his brain is developed by rational education, and the more his mind is refined by the companionship of cultured people in his own class, the more readily and usefully will his soul respond to the call of God, and the more worthily will he fill his place in the citizenship of the British Empire ?

Let us awake to our duty and to our opportunity. Man, to be perfect, must develop body, mind, and soul. The organisation most fitted to perform this task stands ready to our hand. Two things alone are lacking—the enthusiasm of the religious public and the wealth of those whom God has blessed with fortune. And in the meantime thousands are perishing in London—perishing in body, mind, and soul—because there is no adequate provision made for the youth of the city.

To England a chance is now offered the magnitude of whose promise cannot be exaggerated. For—the scope is boundless.

CHAPTER III

A DECENT MAN

A POOR man of Scotch extraction, born in County Antrim, moved to the land of his forefathers at the dawn of his manhood, and settled down as a quarryman in the village of Houston, some few miles out of Paisley. His stature was of the giant order, and he was possessed of prodigious strength. To the deep reflectiveness of his Scotch ancestry he added the gracious humour of the Irish people, so that his words were wise and witty at the same time, so that his society was at the same time serious and delightful. The foundation of his character was reverence for "the Name of God, the Book of God, the Day of God, and the House of God." Everything in his life sprang from this foundational seriousness. He was what we call a deeply religious man.

Soon after settling down to work he married a girl from the Highlands. She was wholly unlike her huge and herculean husband, save in the fullness of her faith. She was small, weak, delicate, and soon after marriage was visited by a long and wasting affliction of the body; but she clung with a strength that equalled her husband's to the faith which illumined not only their own lives, but the lives of their children.

The son, whose story we are now about to follow, has given the world a glimpse of the mother's faith, a glimpse of the life in that Scotch cottage. "My sweetest memory," he once declared, "is to remember, lying awake at night on my bed in my little room, hearing the voice of my dear mother, who *for twenty-five years* had never a night without pain, and never a night with two hours' unbroken sleep on end; and through all that quarter of a century this light shone, till it brought in the everlasting day. My earliest and tenderest memory is lying awake and hearing her, not singing, for she could not sing, but trying to forget her pains by reading in the silence of the night, with all the house, as she thought, sleeping around her, though I was awake. And I can hear her in her woman's voice—and all memories hover over it, for the sweetest voice that can fall on a man's ear is that of his mother—'*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me!*' Sweet mother! may your child rise up some day and bear a like testimony for you!"

This son, not so tall a man as his father, but of sturdy build, thick-set, and enduring, was put to the village school, and learned, with the elementary subjects taught in similar English schools, the rudiments of Latin. When his father moved to a maritime village on the east shore of the Firth of Clyde, the boy attended the local school and prosecuted his studies with a slow and laborious earnestness. From the first he was nothing of a firework. Always he was a plodder, taking slow steps, looking where he went, and considering his purpose in going.

The local minister "remembers being struck by the lad's habit of sitting alone on the doorstep for long spells of meditation."

At the age of thirteen he was put to work. The revenue of the cottage was small, the family was increasing, it became necessary for the son to help his father. The boy put down his Latin Grammar and went out to open and shut a railway gate at the level crossing of the local station. In addition to this labour, he shifted luggage, clipped tickets, and made himself generally useful at the station. He was popular. The tall and burly youth had a red countenance, brown eyes that sparkled mischievously, a big-chested voice peculiar for the tenderness of its tone. People liked to talk to him. He was witty, genial, frank, and, above all things, kind-hearted.

It seemed to him that he was fitted for higher employment. His education was not perhaps above the average in Scotland, where almost every man is something of a scholar, but it was the sense of power within himself, the pressure of a power which seemed greater than his own capacity, and demanded greater opportunities before it could develop that capacity, which drove him to a step destined, most strangely, to affect his future life. The boy in his father's cottage sat down and wrote to the head-quarters of his railway company, stating his opinion that he could worthily fill a higher position than that of porter and ticket-collector. He suggested that the railway company was wasting him.

No answer was received to this letter.

One day he was walking beside a train which had just pulled up at the station, when a man looked hastily out of a carriage window, called him, and asked: "Are you the young man who considers himself too good for his present situation?" The young man's eyes sparkled, and he answered, "I am that young man."

He who looked out from the carriage window was one of the highest officials. He took stock of the fine youth, asked him a few questions, and then, as the train went forward, bade him good-bye, without making a promise of any kind. But a few weeks afterwards the village porter received a letter appointing him second booking-clerk in the Caledonian Station at Greenock. This was a great step. But still the youth felt in his soul the pressure of that sense of power which was like the Hand of God.

The larger life of the city did not bewitch him. There was that in his soul which neither the beguilements of vice nor the materialism of a self-absorbed commerce could satisfy or even attract. The influence of his mother in his mind was like her presence in his room. He was held by her purity, consecrated by her piety. Deep and ineffaceable was the impression made upon his character by this good mother and the cottage life of simple faith and steadfast earnestness.

It was a walk from Greenock to his home, and whenever occasion offered he strode out from the city with his face to the village. "He used to walk to Inverkip, when his work was done, late on Saturday night, so that he might wake up on Sunday morning and know that he was at home for the day."

At the Free Church on Sunday a pastor preached who greatly stirred the depths of this young man's soul. Combined with the sweetness and tenderness of the home reunion, these sermons served to produce in the soul of the youth that change of the spirit's poise and direction which we call conversion. "I was a decent man," he says, "and the decent man is the hardest of all to convert." This conversion was quiet and tranquillising. It was the case of a decent man slowly perceiving that decency is not the highest flower of the spirit, that something radically and inherently bad in human nature calls for extirpation, and that the redemption of human nature by the Son of God is the great pivotal fact of history.

I asked him when he began to be aware of religion as something tremendously real in his life. He replied: "As soon as I began to take notice." Mothers use that phrase about their children. Perhaps God may use it about us. There comes a time in the life of a man when he begins to take notice. And then he sees deep and wide, high and far, and knows that he must *decide*.

Very quietly this young booking-clerk came to see that steep heights of spiritual progress confronted him, and that without a Divine Companion he could never rise from the level of the commonplace. He publicly declared himself a converted man, and this act was the one thing in his conversion which was not invisible, inaudible, and perfectly secret to his soul. He had definitely decided. At this time he was nineteen years of age.

He says that the outward and immediate result

of his conversion was a happy countenance, the expression of an inward and spiritual calm. It was like a liberation. He became brighter and keener. He gave himself more freely to games, sports, and athletic exercises. He had the feeling at last that life was good—good to the very core. His soul, hitherto struggling and obscure, was now conscious of Life, and Life more abundantly.

Another promotion came to him soon after this spiritual experience. He was moved to Edinburgh, to take charge of the Company's office in Princes Street. And very soon after this considerable step he was offered the appointment of clerk in the General Superintendent's Office of the North British Railway Company. Almost the first thing he did in Edinburgh was to become a member of the Young Men's Christian Association, "one of the wisest things a young man can do when he goes to push his way in a town or city." Now that he looks back on his life of extraordinary and world-wide service, this man says that, humanly speaking, his career was determined by that one simple action of joining long ago in Edinburgh an association of young men devoted to the Christian Life.

"I'll tell you," he said, "why the Young Men's Christian Association is such a splendid thing in the life of a big city. It gives the young and lonely man, who lives in lodgings, somewhere to go to. Ah! that's a great thing. *Somewhere to go.* Consider the lodgings in a back street. The dark, cold room. A fire burning, perhaps; yes, but a fire you could put in your hat! Loneliness, cold, dullness, and idle hours. Outside, the glare of the streets, the

laughter, the merriment, the vulgarity, the depravity, the sin of those who deny God. I tell you it's well for a young man, living alone in a great city, to have somewhere to go to in his leisure hours. No man is safe at any time without a sure goal."

The Association in Edinburgh was not only a pleasant club, it was a community fired by the missionary spirit. It sought to fight publicly against what is wrong and base, and to proclaim with all its force the gospel of what is right and noble. It organised itself for missionary work and for open-air preaching. Every member who felt in his soul the importance of conversion was a missionary in his home, his office, the streets and churches of the city. This young railway clerk threw himself into the missionary work. He discovered that he was a fluent speaker, he learned that he was something better—a persuasive speaker; later he knew himself to be called to the service of God.

At the age of twenty-three, encouraged by all who worked with him, he decided to prepare himself for the ministry of the Church. No one was more earnest in this encouragement than the President of the Young Men's Christian Association. There were difficulties ahead, many and great. Long years of study, college fees, a life of poverty and stress. But when he told his mother of this thought, and the brave invalid replied, "I never told you, but I meant you for that from the first," his mind was determined. He resigned from the railway company, became a student missionary of St. Bernard's Church, and entered Edinburgh University. For

three years he attended the necessary Arts classes—"a long, hard, and sore battle"; and afterwards, for a spell of four years, he was preparing himself theologically in Glasgow. Thus working as a lay-missionary he supported himself, and devoted every other minute of his day to the mental preparation demanded in Scotland of him who would serve in the pastorate. It is a story marked throughout, splendidly marked, by that phrase of Gladstone's, "*a long persistency of purpose.*" Never once did the man waver, never once did he turn aside, never once did he lose heart and question if the long, hard, and sore battle was worth the fighting. Grimly he stuck to his task. The little Latin and less Greek of the ex-railway porter marched to an academical approbation at the side of active and human work for Christ done in the slums of Glasgow and Edinburgh.

From the first moment of his pastoral work, he became a famous man. His church was packed from end to end. He held open-air services which were thronged. An Irishman who heard this Ulster Scot said that of all the men he had ever met this man "licks them entoirely for puttin' it on the right foundation and givin' ye the right kind o' feelin'." Dr. Blaikie said of him: "He has contrived to get from his curriculum a refinement and enlargement of mind not common in men who have had his history, while his mind continues to move freely in its native grooves, and to express itself with a simplicity and want of self-consciousness that are very charming."

In appearance he is like a countryman, rugged,

red-faced, bearded, and genial, with shrewd eyes, eyebrows that are seldom at rest, a broad forehead, a full countenance, and a smile which seems at certain moments as if his heart would embrace the whole world. But for this smile the face might be even unpleasing, certainly it would not attract attention; but the smile is the presence of a noble spirit. At the first glance he reminds one of the famous cricketer, Dr. W. G. Grace, and, like Dr. Grace, he has been ever a great sportsman—swimmer, rider, golfer, and man of the open air; but the deep notes of his voice, the rolling accents of his speech, and, above all, the earnest and uncompromising opinions which he utters with a firm assurance, soon acquaint one with the fact that beneath an exterior uncouth, ordinary, and somewhat bucolic, here is a soul unlike any other soul, a man really unique and remarkable, a personality that is refreshing in the depths of its most true originality.

I do not know that I have ever met man in my life who made me so sharply and profoundly conscious of what I would call an isolated personality—a personality absolutely itself; an originality entirely uninfluenced by other men, by books, by the circumstances of environment or the fashions of the day. "Most people," says a cynic, "are other people." This man is himself alone. An ordinary man, but real; not a copy of someone else. Whether he be right or wrong in his views, whether his ideas strike one as broad or narrow, true or false, at least one feels that they are veritably his own views, his own ideas. He is

neither echo nor reflection, but a living voice ; one who has looked at life for himself, has gone deep into his inward soul for the answers to our human riddles, who is himself one of life's realities.

There are few lives more full of danger to the modesty of the soul, I imagine, than the life of a popular preacher. To see one's name "billed" in huge letters on the railings of church and tabernacle, to feel on entering a pulpit that a vast congregation is expecting something remarkable and unique, to be conscious in the commonest humanities of daily life that one is on the pedestal of a particular apostleship, and that even in brushing one's hair before a spectator one must be careful not to dislocate the halo—this is surely to live in a spiritual peril as great as that which comes from carnal iniquity. Then, too—unfortunately for the religious life in our period—there is a competition for pulpits, a rivalry for newspaper notoriety, and a necessity, if the popularity of a preacher is to continue, for incessant publicity. I do not think it is an uncharitable comparison to liken these idols of the pulpit to fashionable beauties who, to maintain their position, must for ever wage a millinery warfare one against the other.

Moreover, behind the scenes of sectarian propaganda are a thousand pitiful jealousies, a thousand contemptible meannesses. Until one has made acquaintance with the inner life of organised religion, one cannot realise the immense danger which exists for the preacher in these infinitely small and infinitely trivial workings of the huge machine. I

once spent an hour with a popular preacher whose views on religious experience I was really anxious to obtain, and he wasted that entire hour for me, and would, I think, have wasted many more if I had allowed him to do so, in pouring out his grievance against a certain journalist on the staff of a religious paper who had minimised the reports of his revival services, and had hinted that his popularity was on the wane !

I have found among men of the world more religion, more beauty of the spiritual life, than I have yet found among professional disciples. In conversation with the members of the Young Men's Christian Association I discovered far greater depth of spiritual reality, a far more sensitive apprehension of the sweetness and modesty of Christ, than I have found among popular preachers. It would be, I am sure, a most excellent discipline for the preacher if he mixed with such a body of laymen as that which composes the Young Men's Christian Association, if he put off the orator, forgot himself as Sir Oracle, and with all modesty and humility gave himself to the work of sympathetically understanding the thoughts and feelings of these apparently lesser men.

In the case of the man whose story I have briefly sketched above, the danger of an almost world-wide popularity has been greatly mitigated by his experience of the Association, by his companionship with humble struggles after virtue, by his knowledge of the immense valour and noble endurance which inspire the soul of Christianity's anonymous laity. Yet I would not pretend that he has altogether

escaped the perils of notoriety, or that he has arrived at a just estimate of the worth of his pedestal. But I do think that he has retained, and with a firm hold, the great essentials of the Christian verity, and that he is in no danger of substituting a personal and original theology for the ancient religion of his Master.

He holds, if I understand him aright, that conversion is the central fact of the Christian religion. He maintains that Christ made it the central fact. For him, beyond all doubt, there is a moment in a man's life when decision is made, one way or another—the decision to accept or to reject Christ as Saviour-Redeemer. And he declares that the chronicles of conversion supply at once the proof of Christianity's divine origin and a refutation of the theses of materialism.

I have heard of a preacher who would lift a tumbler of water from the ledge of a pulpit, let it fall to the pavement of the church, and then, leaning over his pulpit, contemplating the shivered glass and the spreading trickle of spilt liquid, would ask someone to give him back that tumbler of water. In some such way this Scot regards the miracle of conversion ; and with that miracle challenges the man of science. He says that the mechanical evolutionist cannot explain how a man smashed to pieces by sin and iniquity is restored, suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, to a man wholly different from that he was before. He thinks that David in the Fortieth Psalm presented a truer view of life than the hasty protagonist of evolution, who would reduce existence to the iron laws of mechanics.

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. In these few words is expressed for him the whole miracle of conversion and the complete answer to the materialistic man of science. A poor wretch, smashed to pieces at the bottom of a pit, shattered out of the likeness of humanity, and lying helpless in the midst of miry clay, is suddenly lifted up, lifted into fresh air, placed upon a rock, and inspired with an entirely different spirit of existence. From miry clay to rock—where is the evolution ? From the bottom of the pit to an established way of going—where is the machinery ? He challenges science, not only to account for this miracle, but to perform a like act without the aid of God.

He views the present time, if I am not mistaken, with some misgiving. He thinks that the present generation does not realise the immense difference in value between things temporal and things eternal. He regards the general passion for æsthetics as a grave danger—the act of a madman who refuses the bread of life and seeks to support his strength with the decorations of existence. He does not play the Philistine towards art, but he says that art is not the object of life, that a man cannot nourish his soul by art, that Christ and His Apostles certainly did not labour for art at the beginning of our era. For what purpose did Christ come ? and by what means did the *Acts of the Apostles* come to be written ?—let a man, he says, honestly face those two questions, and he will be forced to see that there is something beyond art, that art is at

least secondary—in fact, that the soul of man is the one object of existence. He does not believe that any solution will ever be found for political and social problems, until the nation is convinced that Christ is the universal Saviour, and that the supreme purpose of human life is the education of the soul.

He will have nothing to do with new theologies. These teachings he is inclined to regard as short-cuts, not to Christianity, but away from Christianity. Those who follow the new theologies do not live the Christ life; they think that they think that life, but they cannot imagine that they really live it. Do they convert sinners? Do they visit the sick, the prisoners and captives, the widows and the fatherless? Do they hunger and thirst for the souls of men? He asks if the *Acts of the Apostles*—that great fountain-head of the Christian religion—could ever have been written if those who followed Christ had held the views of the new theologies.

There is, I think, something harsh and something hard and something narrow in his presentment of the Christian religion, but one cannot doubt that he holds with a most virile tenacity the original essentials—the divinity of Christ and the need of a new birth for the spirit.

In the narratives which follow the reader will find that these two verities influence the souls of ordinary men, and transform human life in a most extraordinary manner. And he will see that the revolution of a spiritual change does not always proceed from gradual or sudden adhesion to a certain doctrine, does not always flow from the excitement of a

revivalist meeting, is not always inspired by something said very eloquently or very strikingly by a popular preacher. I am disposed to think that there are as many conversions outside the churches as within, that many of them are entirely independent of theological opinion, and that in the majority of cases they are experienced without one throb of excitement, without one spasm of violence. I believe that many men quite outside the churches say to themselves, "I will arise and go to my Father"; and that no one save the Father is aware of the turning round of that soul.

It has been to me an ever-increasing experience to discover much Christianity outside the folds of theology, and within those folds but little. I am as greatly surprised by the number of Christians outside the churches as by the paucity of Christians within. And a saying of Christ's has become for me exceedingly real and exceedingly wonderful in consequence; that saying which should be of tremendous warning to the professional Christian, and of singular encouragement to the good man who does not dare to call himself a Christian :—

"*Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.*"

CHAPTER IV

THE ACCIDENTS OF LIFE

NOT many years ago a young journalist came to London from the North of England, and took up a humble position on one of those numerous and struggling newspapers which are published in the suburbs.

He was at this time only nineteen years of age, typical of the North Country in the shrewdness and energy of his character, and on every possible score a youth of whom one would say that for him at least the manifold temptations of the metropolis presented scarcely the element of danger. He came to London not aimlessly, but with the definite purpose to push his fortunes. Even his ambition was practical; he did not dream of establishing a reputation or of climbing to an editorial chair. "I knew," he told me, "that London was the best school of journalism, and my theory was to work hard, learn my business, get all the experience I could, and then return as soon as possible to my native town and the provincial newspaper on which I had begun my career."

Not only was his ambition practical and earnest, but his temperament was antipathetic to vice, frivolity, and looseness of any kind. He was not

one of those men to whom the streets of London are like a fiery furnace. In the cold and garnished chambers of his brain the lights of the town shone with no glamour of illusion. He was a spectator of the drama of the streets, moved neither by the apparent gaiety of the swarming crowds nor by the obvious misery, destitution, and depravity which mocked at every turn the pageant of this crowding pleasure. He looked on. He observed. He reflected and made notes. A cooler brain, a more detached philosopher, has seldom come to the great city even from the North of England. I feel about him that he is one of those rare children of temperamental isolation for whom there exists no contagion.

He is now a man of six- or seven-and-twenty, and the experience through which he has passed can almost be read in his worn and haggard face before it is dragged, slowly, thoughtfully and reluctantly, from his lips. He has suffered terribly, frightfully, suffered nearly every bitterness and deprivation which can befall unlucky men at the crowded centres of life ; and the true measure of his agony is the strong and stoical character of his nature, his isolation of soul, his solitude and loneliness of brain, so that, listening to him as he describes those experiences and seeks to analyse his feelings—a pale and rather cynical smile on his lips—one realises that this man has endured tragedy of a very deep and penetrating order, a tragedy deeper than the heart, an unshared and bitterly self-annotated tragedy of the brain and soul.

The face is handsome but not attractive at the

first glance. There is a suggestion of scorn on the lips that are never firmly closed, of mockery in the eyes that are weary and rather contemptuous ; it is the face of a man who cannot easily " give himself," who is never carried away by passion or enthusiasm, who is self-watchful, self-critical, self-centred, and perhaps distrustful of every single creature on the earth until he has searched them through and through for himself, and come to a judgment, which, he would probably say, laughing at himself, is quite likely to be wrong. Yet there are moments, rare and silent, when one feels that his solitude has at last established, or at any rate is beginning to establish, the only contact that counts.

He had been brought up from childhood by an aunt of whom he thought censoriously at the time, but for whom he is now inclined to entertain gentler feelings, almost of affection. " She was a hard woman," he said, " one of those rigid and cast-iron personalities, so sure of themselves that they think it an easy matter to manage other people. But I recognise now that she meant to be kind, and that her rigorous dragooning was intended for my benefit. She thought she could drill me into decency and success."

I asked him if he had received from this woman, the earliest influence on his life, any definite notions of religion.

" No," he replied, " not directly from her, and nothing definite. I cannot recall any single reference ever made by her to religion. That is to say, she neither taught me religion, nor, what would perhaps have been much better, discussed the subject with

me. But she sent me to a Sunday-school, and on the occasions when I grew restive she would tell me that it was the right thing to do, to go to Sunday-school, and that I must submit to her judgment. She was of the Church of England, but so far as I remember did not very often go to church; she sent me there, however, and always spoke of church attendance as one of the usual duties of life."

At school he had exactly the same feeling for religion as he had for arithmetic; it was one of the subjects. He grew up with exactly the same feeling for religion as he had for the wash-basin and the hair-brush; it was one of the respectabilities.

When he arrived in London he was far too much concerned with his daily work to give a single thought to religion. It simply dropped out of his life, and the loss of it made no difference. If he had dropped his watch, or his pocket-handkerchief, he would have missed it and looked about for it. But religion fell from his thought, and he was even unconscious of the fall.

"I think it is very likely," he said, "that I should have gone occasionally to church, if my work had allowed; for, you see, to go to church on Sunday was something of a habit with me, and at any rate it would at least have been something to do. But I simply never gave it a thought, because my work occupied every hour of life from week-end to week-end. People have no idea how hard a journalist is worked on these suburban papers. Why should they? Who is likely to be interested or care a jot for the obscure writer on a local rag! But really it was hard work. I very often wrote

eighteen or twenty columns a week, and besides the writing I had to superintend the printing and the proof-reading, besides doing what I could to push the sales. I really doubt if ever a slave worked harder than I did then, and as many a man is doing now, on a London suburban newspaper. There was certainly no time for going to church."

To add to his depression of mind and to increase his gradual feeling of bitterness, was the matter of lodgings.

"Heaven save a man," he exclaimed, "from living in London suburban lodgings! I shall never forget my experiences. I put an advertisement in the paper, and received over a hundred answers. At how many doors I knocked I can't say, but I could almost swear that at every one a different smell encountered my nostrils. The gloom of those narrow passages! The suffocation of those dirty little rooms! The grime upon everything—windows, furniture, hangings, and bed-linen! Ugh! And worse than the houses, worse than the rooms, worse than the furniture—the landladies! Oh, yes, a thousand times worse. I think I could almost write a book about those women. They seemed to come to the front door from some frightful lair in the back regions, like hungry animals disturbed in sleep. Dirty tired faces, dirty unbrushed hair, dirty slattern clothes—like scarecrows. It always seemed to me that those women were not properly awake. They were sleep-walkers, crawling about in their dark houses, like figures in an evil dream. I have been in pretty low places since those days, and I have got accustomed to the doss-house and

the coffee-shop ; but I could not bring myself to go back to suburban lodgings in London without a struggle. You see, I could only afford to pay fourteen shillings a week."

For some three years, at a beggarly wage, he slaved on this little paper, and then moved to another suburban district and into better circumstances. All this time, the reader must be careful to remember, he had lived a moral and an earnest life, unbeguiled by any one of the temptations which drag a man swiftly or slowly down to the gutter and inevitably defile his soul. He was too hard-worked to go to church or to think about religion, and too hard-worked to go to the dogs. A trivial circumstance broke the connection with this new paper after he had been there a couple of years. However, the loss of regular employment and steady pay was not in the nature of disaster. He had learned the ropes. He knew how the great London dailies get their news. And, what was more important still, he had made the acquaintance of several men on the sub-editorial staffs of some of the principal London papers. He was in the position to start as a free lance.

It must be explained to the reader that beneath the regular editorial staff of a newspaper, and below the regular sub-editorial staff of reporters and news writers, there are two wings of a great and numerous free-lance army. In the one wing are men of letters, people of note or position, who contribute special articles and are well paid for this occasional work ; and in the other wing are the young writer struggling for a foothold, the old and

broken writer struggling to keep up appearances, and a heterogeneous host of life's failures from every trade and profession in the world, seeking to keep body and soul together by the easiest way of obtaining bread without much effort and without the necessity of special knowledge. Paragraphs are paid for by shillings and half-crowns.

Our young man from the North came into this free-lance army with the determination to make himself useful and without a single misgiving. It was, in some ways, a step up. The opportunities for experience were innumerable, the field of discovery was enormous. He dreamed no dreams, but he looked confidently to getting a regular place on one of the great papers, and then, crammed with a rich experience, to go back to his native town, a much more valuable commodity in that local market.

Even here, in the larger and infinitely more dangerous world of London journalism, he stood clear of folly and uncontaminated by vice. So far as conduct goes he was an ordinarily moral man; virtue did not attract him, but sin had no bewitchments for him. He was a clever, rational, and industrious young man following a definite road to material prosperity.

For some time he did very well as a free lance. He ran here and there, picked up news, got information, discovered interesting things, and turned them all into brief and simple "copy." Occasionally he received a commission from a newspaper and served as a reporter at public functions, banquets, and even in the Press Gallery of the House of

Commons. There were certainly weeks when he earned little money, but there were also single days when he earned as much as he had hitherto received in the suburbs for a whole week's work. He was quite contented. He had no misgivings.

Then there occurred one of those great events in life whose consequences reach into the remotest corners of national existence. King Edward died. For days, for weeks, the newspapers filled themselves with this tremendous matter. Special correspondents, distinguished contributors and photographers were kept busy from morning to night. The news-getter was crowded out.

Our man went hither and thither, but in vain. His news might be good, might be interesting, might be better than anything he had done before, but there was no room for it. He asked to be put on special jobs. They were all filled.

His money melted away. He became anxious.

Some weeks after the Royal funeral he began to get occasional work, but with nothing like the same regularity. It was one of those accidents in life which seem to sever many and long-accustomed connections.

The Coronation of King George proved our man's culminating disaster. Long before the day of the great pageant the papers concerned themselves with little else than the preparations. He found it impossible to earn sufficient money for his daily needs.

"I thought it well out," he told me, "and then I saw that it was a case of surrender. I was beaten. I hated to do it, I struggled against it, for I suppose

I'm rather proud, and anyhow it was a thing I had never done before or ever contemplated for a moment—I determined to ask for help from my relatives. I knew of cousins who lived in R——. I knew they were well-off, for I had heard my aunt speak of property they owned in the town. And I knew that they kept a shop. The money I possessed was just sufficient to take me there by train and buy me a clean collar. I went down one afternoon, hating it as you can imagine, and approached the street in which the shop was situated, penniless and self-loathing. But other feelings soon took possession of me. The shop was not to be found! I inquired here and there, but no one could give me information of any kind. Like a true journalist I made for the local newspaper office. The proprietor could tell me nothing beyond the fact that the family had long left the town. I told him my position. He was quite decent, but he said he really had not work enough for his own staff. His son said he could put me up for the night, and I slept there, grateful for a bed. Next day I set out and walked to London.

"I am a good walker, but I shall never forget how my whole body ached that day. I arrived in London at night, very footsore, very dusty, and absolutely ravenous for food. By good fortune, I met a fellow-journalist who had a sixpence in his pocket. The good chap bought me a glass of milk and a scone, and smuggled me, without being seen by the landlady, into the cubicle where he lodged by the week. I slept till eight o'clock the next morning!"

And then our man came down upon the bed-rock of life.

For weeks he walked and starved upon the London streets, for weeks he slept and starved on the Embankment. Now and then a friend in luck took pity upon him; now and then he earned a few pence; but for days he absolutely starved, was pierced by cold and rain, and regarded the river as perhaps the best solution of his difficulty.

It was only with the very greatest difficulty that he could bring himself to speak of those days. He seemed to tear the words from his heart. There was always the pale smile on his lips, always the mocking look in his eyes—half as if he detested himself for speaking at all, and half as if he knew that no one else could understand these matters—but the worn, thin face would flush again and again, his voice would almost break, and he would suddenly, with an effort, look straight in my eyes and say, "You know it's awfully difficult to say all this."

In brief, this is what he told me.

"There are two ways of describing those days. The point of view *then*, the point of view *now*. I dare say, too, that another man would describe exactly the same things quite differently. It depends on the temperament. I remember one thing very clearly. As I was walking about the streets, awfully tired and awfully hungry, it seemed to me that everybody I passed knew it perfectly well, just as well as I did, and didn't care a hang. It seemed to me, too, that they were all tremendously rich and comfortable. And I used to think that these very rich and comfortable people

knew how awfully hungry I was, and how awfully tired, and that they didn't care.

"Of course, it was absurd. I look back now and laugh. But that was my feeling at the time, and it was rather bad. In the case of a man with less restraint and hotter blood it might have been dangerous. When a chap is starving on the streets he lives in a kind of dazed illusion. It's very queer. I wonder if people think about that. Nothing is quite real, except his hunger; even that becomes at last a numb ache. Everything is like a dream, the sort of dream in which you want to shriek. The cheapest jeweller's shop seems to flash with the wealth of Monte Cristo. The meanest baker's window suggests a royal banquet. The smells of a greasy cookshop are simply delicious, but maddening. And everybody, as I said, seems to be prodigiously rich, *and to know*."

Then I got this from him.

"It was while I was starving on the streets that I first thought definitely about God, or religion. Not very beautiful thoughts, as you can imagine! It seemed to me that all these immensely rich people who knew I was hungry and didn't care, were Christians. It made me angry with Christianity, to think what a false and humbugging thing it was. I never considered it as a theology; I just thought of it as a religion. It seemed to me a most ghastly sham. Here was I, hungry and tired in the very centre of London, and no one cared a curse for me! All these preposterously rich Christians looked at me, knew my need, and passed on without a twinge of conscience! One Sunday I was frightfully

weary, and slipped into a church, just for the rest. The prayers and music rather soothed me ; I knew them quite well, and their familiarity was something in the nature of a consolation. But when the parson got up to preach all my ire rose up in my soul. I don't know the man, not even his name, but I'd lay anything he's a humbug. Truly, he made me wild. Every word rang false ; the intonation was an affectation ; the gestures were all studied ; and—well, the whole thing was perfectly beastly to me ! I simply couldn't stand it. I got up in the middle of his preaching, and walked out of church, disgusted with religion.

" I had always believed in a God, in some great Power overruling the universe, although I had never seriously concerned myself with the question. It was rather at the back of my mind ; it seldom presented itself to my definite consciousness. But I began now to doubt if God of any kind existed at all. It wasn't on account of my own misfortune ; my own bitterness had nothing to do with it. It was from what I saw. I don't like to tell you these things. I doubt if they can be told. But I saw things which made me feel as if God could not possibly exist."

I pressed him to tell me.

" Here is one thing," he said reluctantly, " but it's rather horrible, and I can't describe it fully ; you'll have to imagine the real horror for yourself. One night I was sitting on a seat by Blackfriars Bridge, jolly tired and nearly nodding off to sleep. Two women came shuffling towards the bench and sat down together. They were middle-aged women,

dressed in most filthy rags. They spoke to each other in that whimpering and complaining, but perfectly resigned tone of voice which is common to all miserable women. They talked of their aches and pains. They were comforting each other. Then one of them spoke of her cancer, and said it was getting terrible. She opened her dirty jacket to show her friend. I turned my head to look. Both breasts were eaten away. "God in heaven!" I cried to myself, and got upon my feet and walked away as hard as I could go. I looked up at the stars; they seemed devilish. I looked at the river; it seemed infernal. I can't tell you exactly what I felt at that moment, but I was certainly then what men call Godless. I did not arraign God, or feel animosity against Him. I simply felt that He could not exist. That woman—homeless and penniless on the streets! . . .

"But these were sudden uprushes, which came and went. I was never persistently without the sense of some God in the universe. However, my thoughts were generally pretty bitter. Most of them were directed against Christianity as a sham religion.

"Then I came to see that my position, my material position, was absolutely desperate. I saw that I must make a final effort or perish on the streets. A friend gave me a few coppers, and I bought a clean collar, had a wash, and set out to call on sub-editors. I surprised myself. I never knew I had such audacity. I wasn't ashamed at the time, although I am now, but I was amazed at my own cheek. I simply refused to take their No. I

stood there and said I was hungry, that I was literally starving, that they had *got* to give me work. And do you know what most of them said ? It hurt me more than anything else. They said, 'My dear fellow, I know dozens of chaps like you.' Well, that seemed awfully hard. It seemed really brutal. I—well, I simply couldn't stand it. Dozens ! —yes, dozens and hundreds, and that was the excuse for not giving me a crust of bread ! Of course, I see it differently now. But at the time it hurt me awfully.

"An idea occurred to me. I had once written some paragraphs for a theatrical man. I went off to the theatre and offered myself as his press agent. I couldn't see him, but his manager said there was no chance of such work for me. I begged him to let me have a shot. He said No, and gave me his reasons for thinking that such work did not affect the bookings.

"I left him, and walked away in absolute despair. I suppose I must have been very near a physical collapse. Presently I felt that I could walk no further. I came to a street corner in the Strand, and stopped. What should I do ? It was the end of things for me. I recognised that. But what should I do ?—how should I take it, and where ? At that moment, I can't tell you why, I raised my head and looked up at the tall building on the opposite side of the road. I knew it well. It was the office of the *Morning Post*. But I looked above the windows of the newspaper to the windows of the second floor—how or why I cannot tell you—and there I saw the words, 'Young Men's Christian

Association.' It didn't strike me at the time as an inspiration, nor was I conscious of anything mysterious in the fact that I had looked up, straight at those words. The only thought I had was an angry one, at any rate a bitter one. I remembered that I had heard in my native town something about this Association and its machinery for helping young men in great cities. I thought to myself, 'Well, I'll test their Christianity!' I crossed the road, entered the building, and went up to the second floor.

"My manner must have been very bad, but I think it was in keeping with my appearance. I went straight up to the first man I saw, a good-looking and rather well-dressed young fellow, and said, 'I want a job.' It was really more in the nature of a challenge than anything else that I had come, a loud, arrogant, and cynical challenge, testing this religion of Christianity. I shall never forget what followed. It was nothing dramatic. It was nothing that can be said in actual words. It all came from the look in that man's eyes and the tone of the voice in which he answered me. All of a sudden the miracle had happened. *Christianity was a real thing.*

"I was so completely aware of this reality that I was instantly ashamed of the way in which I had spoken. The young man did not give me time, however, to express contrition. He asked me what work I could do, and what I had done in the past. His questions were quite business-like, but all the time there was that look in his eyes, that tone in his voice, which—well, which made a tremendous dis-

turbance in my soul. At the time, of course, I did not analyse my feelings. I simply accepted the revelation that religion was a real thing. And even this feeling passed, when he went to the telephone and I knew that I had got work. Heavens, how happy I was !

" He spoke to me about religion, in a perfectly sincere and wholly inoffensive way ; but I did not relish a colloquy, and simply said I had not thought about it. He said, ' Well, think about it now ; no man can be happy outside the Kingdom of God.' I said I would think about it, and then he asked me if I had any money. He lent me sixpence, and I bought another new collar, had a shave, and went off to my work.

" The man to whom he sent me has a Home for boys. I shall never forget him. He is a prince of men. From the first moment he showed me kindness and trusted me. He gave me a sovereign in advance of my wages, and did it so naturally and pleasantly that it didn't hurt. I began to think again that there was something real in religion. And then I saw that man's life and work. I saw the scum of the gutter brought into the Home and turned into the cream of human nature before my very eyes. I looked on, wondered, and reflected.

" I think my first definite step to what I now understand as religion came from the reflection that these people helped me and were kind to me—helped heaps of others and were equally kind to them—because they were religious. I knew that there was nothing likeable in me ; that I had no rational reason to suggest why I should be helped

by them; and that therefore it must be for some other reason that they were so very kind and so willing to help me.

"I went frequently to see my original friend at the Association. I used the rooms for writing. I liked the warmth. I liked the companionships I found there. I played chess; I smoked; I read the papers; and I thought. I really can't tell you what passed through my mind. It was simply a deepening of the first feeling. I grew to reflect more and more upon that act of kindness towards me which had first made me conscious of religion as a real thing. It led me far afield. I began to wonder if there are really any *accidents* in life, if everything is not in some strange way invisibly controlled from without us. I thought of the sudden inclination at the street corner, which had led me to look up to those windows on the second floor. I could not explain it. I saw that it might have been chance, but I felt that there was something more than that in it; I could not rid my mind of the idea that it was destined.

"Then I began to wonder about religion as a real thing, as a vital principle of life, not simply as theology. I saw that these men I met at the Association—and, by George, they are men, *real men*, I can give them no higher title—were not formalists, certainly not humbugs, but were in some strange way, a way that at first seemed to me a little uncanny, different from myself and the men with whom I had hitherto lived. They were separate and distinct. I observed that they were profoundly happy. I noticed that there was something bright

and attractive in their faces. I liked their manner, their behaviour, their goodness and vigour, which I felt to be extraordinarily thorough.

"How can I tell you the rest? It's the most difficult of all. In fact, even to myself, I can't express it in words. I try to analyse it, but I can't. I try to see it vividly, but it eludes me. And besides, it isn't a thing, it's a process; and I don't know myself where it will lead me."

I spoke about the two forms of conversion—the swift and sudden turning about, the slow and gradual turning round.

"Yes, I know," he replied; "there are the two things. I've heard about sudden moments of illumination, flashes of light, and immediate new birth; but nothing like that has occurred to me. No; it's altogether different. And it's going on now, just as I suppose most men feel that their spiritual life is a gradual matter, an evolution, an approach to something always ahead. It began with me the very moment I entered the Association, deepened as I saw the life lived by the men, and it came to something rather big and something rather beautiful, one night, at a service, in the Association's room. There was a man who gave an address; it touched me; there were one or two stories in it that really did move me; and afterwards he came and spoke to me; we were there, I think, till after midnight, alone together. And—well, you know that phrase about giving the heart to God? I think I did that then. Well, I know I did. I did, that night, give my heart to God."

He paused for some time.

"Nothing happened," he continued, "except a feeling that I had done what was right, and that the thing would work itself out. It's working itself out now. There is a difference in me, but I can't define it. I can only tell you that I am happy, and that I look back on all that I went through as something that was necessary. It has a meaning for me. Perhaps that is my illumination—the feeling that everything in life is linked up and that God is at work. *There are no accidents.* But we can't explain these ideas, these feelings, which swim in the soul. They are there, and if we let them, they will control us."

Very soon after this deliverance from despair, and this turning about to the light, he received a letter in answer to an application he had made *months before* for a situation on a provincial newspaper.

"That is another thing," he said, "that struck me as mysterious. I saw the advertisement in a paper when I was beginning to go rather badly down; I spent a penny on answering it, and the next day forgot all about it. If the answer had come at once, I should never have had this experience of conversion; and it has come just when I want it. Of course, it may only be coincidence. But it seems mysterious. At any rate, I feel certain that things have happened to me from outside myself. And I can't believe that there are any accidents."

However far he may be from the "central touch," the absolute union of the soul, at any rate he has escaped from the isolation of his former life.

CHAPTER V

A BAD HAT

AT the age of seventeen he was sent out to Canada. His parents felt that England was not big enough for his energies. "All I hope is this," said the father, "that you won't live to be hanged." He had once thrown a table-knife at his mother.

He is a man of forty, bright, alert, and animated. His appearance is decidedly handsome, and he rather lays himself out, one thinks, to heighten these natural advantages. He is very well dressed, carefully groomed, and suggests prosperous circumstances—perhaps a good conceit as well. You would pass him in the street for a successful stock-broker. I really do not think that one man in a million would guess for a single instant that the extraordinary thing had happened to him.

"When I went to Canada," he told me, "the only bad things about me were temper and a love of devilry for its own sake. My temper started when I was quite a chicken. I was turned out of the Sunday-school again and again; I had rather a decent voice and sang in the church choir, but they hoofed me out of that as well. I was for ever doing wild things, and then rushing into a

blazing temper directly I was called to account. But I had moments of remarkable gentleness; there were times when I was even tender and affectionate, particularly with my mother. It used to be a saying with my father that I was either a lion or a lamb. In my gentle moments I wanted to be good; in my wild moments I had but one single concern, and that was to keep out of prison. I didn't care what I did, so long as I was not laid by the heels."

I asked him if the religion he was taught in Sunday-school, and the religion he heard about in church, had had any conscious effect upon his mind.

"I don't think," he replied, "it made the smallest difference to me. In Sunday-school I was always thinking of larks and mischief; and in church, beyond the singing, which simply interested me as singing, I was only bored to death by the repetition of prayers and the intolerable length of the sermons. I went to church far too often to care about it. At last it got on my nerves, and I didn't go at all."

Then he told me about the change which came over him in America.

"I worked on a line of steamers among the lakes. It was a wild part of the world. My mates represented every class of Englishman. Some were scholars, some were gentlemen, some were working-men; and the whole crowd of them were blackguards. They thought of absolutely nothing but drink and vice. There was one little station on a certain lake where all the houses were occupied by women who were far more like fiends than

human beings. Men used to go there from the neighbouring towns. When any of our fellows rowed out, the women would come right into the water to meet them, wearing no clothes at all. . . .

"I soon got sick of life aboard ship, and managed to get some work in the States. Someone recommended me to a boarding-house in the town where my job lay. It was managed by a woman whose husband was an old humpbacked veteran, half silly or, at any rate, unnaturally quiet and self-absorbed. He used to sit all day in a rocking-chair on the verandah, one leg over the arm, swinging himself slowly to and fro, a sad, far-away sort of smile on his face, his eyes looking straight ahead of him—a most queer and sad old man. And his wife—well, she was a demon. That woman got hold of me, and I was powerless in her hands. Not only that, there were two unmarried girls in the house, and they were just as bad as the woman. . . . When I look back now, I see that that house was like hell. I didn't think so at first, and I didn't see it as it really was even when I left. I used to laugh at the poor old humpbacked man in the rocking-chair. I was proud of my attractions. Life seemed to me, at first, highly amusing and exciting. I was young, tremendously strong, and fancied my good looks. Besides this, I was something of a fighting-man, and took pride in making myself cock of the walk. I liked to feel that men feared me. I liked to know that I was pointed out as a terror. I worked hard, made money, and lived like a real bad one. Those who called me a bad hat weren't far out.

"Of course, I never once thought of going to church. For one reason, there was not a single white man's church in the place. There were a few nigger churches about, and I would sometimes go there with a friend or two, just for the fun of hearing a nigger preach. We used to make game of the poor fellows, used to laugh at them, just as if we were in a theatre. Religion didn't occupy my mind in any way, and this nigger religion only seemed to me a thing for amusement.

"But after some months, nearly a year, I was suddenly visited by the most intense feeling of home-sickness. I can't tell you how it came, and perhaps the cause was only physical exhaustion, but anyhow I felt such a tugging of my heart homewards as was absolutely irresistible. I got to hate the town, to hate my work, to hate the saloons, and to loathe—oh yes, to *loathe*—those women and the boarding-house. It became unbearable. The feeling that I must go home was most intense.

"One day I sold everything up, and started home. There was nothing in my heart of repentance, no shame for the life I had been living, no desire for goodness. I was simply filled with a giant disgust, a feeling that I must get away, a kind of ravenous hunger to be home in England. That was all. But looking back now I see what was really happening to me at that time. It was the beginning of a most marvellous mercy.

"Well, I got home at last, welcomed with tears of rejoicing by my mother, and not too warmly received by my father. However, I had sobered down a bit, and soon made it clear that I intended

to get work and stick to it. My father was evidently relieved by this change in me. He took steps to help me, and at the age of twenty I found myself in the employ of Government.

"For some months I lived a more or less regular life, my only real trial that hotness of temper which seemed to get worse the more virtuously and temperately I lived. At the slightest provocation I would hit a man, and many a big fight marked my calendar of those days. I don't suppose anybody but a man who has suffered in this way can understand the violence and savagery of a really fiery temper. The smallest thing sets the blood boiling. The least contradiction in an argument is insufferable. Let one little thing go wrong in dressing or in eating or in working, and you want to chuck the whole caboodle out of the window.

"There was an old man working close at my side in this Government office, a really dear old fellow, who quite quietly, quite gradually, established a feeling of friendship in my heart. I got to like him, and we would talk together, and look at each other as men do when there is an understanding of soul between them. We would go out to luncheon together. He used to ask me about Canada and the States. I told him stories and he would listen with interest. Gradually, and I cannot recall how it came about, the dear old man used to talk about life and conduct, about the difference between goodness and wickedness. I was interested, and gave my opinion in the downright fashion which characterised my manner in those days. He never showed the least resentment, and would listen

patiently, and reply very gently, always like a man of the world who is not easily shocked or unnaturally good.

"But one day he said to me, 'Why don't you come with me to the Young Men's Christian Association? Do you know, I think you'd enjoy it. There are some very pleasant fellows up there, and we get some really good intelligent conversations.' The name, *Young Men's Christian Association*, gave me a kind of shudder. I almost laughed; I almost scoffed. But he went on speaking so simply and naturally, that I forgot this first feeling, and finally said I would go with him one day. To this he answered, 'There's an Indian missionary over here just now, a very fine man, a Hindu Christian; he is speaking at Exeter Hall on the Opium Question; you ought to hear him.—What do you say if we go to-morrow in the dinner-hour?' I said, 'All right; if you're going, I'll go with you'; and never gave the matter another thought till next day.

"And that next day was the beginning of my awakening. The Hindu was a fine speaker, and a very impressive man altogether. As I sat and listened to him I was fascinated. Then the horror of opium seized upon me. Then the thought that England, my country, was concerned in the trade, set me on fire with indignation. My blood began to boil. I wanted to start off then and there, to fight the devilish thing. I could see the homes of men and women brought to desolation by the poisonous drug, I could see children turned out upon the road to die of starvation, I could see the souls of millions going down to perdition, rotten

and corrupted and destroyed. And England made money out of it. Not only permitted it, but profited by it—profited by the ruin of millions of helpless men. I tell you, my blood was on fire. I wanted to start up, then and there, and be off to do something. I didn't think what, but *anything* to stop this most damnable shame."

He had never thought, in the midst of his own sins, how he dragged souls down to ruin. It had never occurred to him that he had responsibility towards those who tempted him and to whose temptations he so readily yielded. He had never once experienced the agony of that emotion which cried out to God from the soul of a saint—

> Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
> Others to sin, and made my sin their door?

But now, confronted with the thousandfold desolations wrought by a sin in which he had never shared, his soul revolted, and he was consumed with a passionate indignation. He ranged himself incontinently on the side of righteousness. He was ready, on the instant, to rise up and strike for God.

From that moment he was facing in the right direction. It is clear that his eyes were not yet opened, that his heart was far from being cleansed, and that the mystery of the new birth had not yet changed and transformed his whole nature. Nevertheless, in the sense that he had swung clean round, was no longer facing away from God, but was facing towards God, he was at that moment converted. The full conversion of spirit was soon to follow.

For a week he talked to his old friend at the Government office about the Opium Trade, about

Christianity, about the life of the soul. At the end of this period, willingly and eagerly, he accompanied his friend to a spiritual meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association.

The speaker on this occasion dealt with the necessity for a life of service.

"One word," the man told me, "rang through all he said. It was the word *Work*. He insisted again and again that no man could truly be said to love Christ who did not work for Him. Any man who deeply realised that the beautiful and holy Christ was *his* Saviour and *his* Redeemer, would work for Him and fight for Him against the hosts of evil.

"That word *Work* stuck in my mind. It seemed to be echoing itself in my soul. All the time he was speaking I was saying to myself, *Work*, *work*, *work*—knowing that it was true, and wondering how I could work for Christ. I wanted to work. I was eager to do something. But I couldn't see what I should do. It was perfectly clear to me, as clear as daylight, that if a man really once felt that he owed Christ an immense debt, he would work day and night for his triumph over sin. That was quite clear. But how to work, what kind of work—that puzzled me.

"After the address came a prayer, and in the prayer was the word *armour*. Man had to put on the whole armour of Christ. Before he could do anything for his Saviour, before he could safely attack the enemy, he had to put on that Saviour's armour. I remember, as if it was yesterday, the question springing up in my mind, *Have I got that*

armour? It was like a sudden cry of, 'Hands up!' on a dark road. It jerked me right back upon myself. I was startled, confused, frightened. I felt absolutely helpless.

"Then it dawned upon me, and it must have been a message from God, that the armour of Christ was faith — faith in Him as Saviour and Redeemer. Difficulties against believing *that* came crowding into my soul, like a swarm of living things. For a moment I was bewildered. How could I believe when I didn't believe? What was the use of saying I would have faith in Christ as my Saviour and Redeemer when the faith was absent from my brain? While these chaotic thoughts were chasing themselves about in my troubled mind I realised, all of a sudden, that the soul could seize upon faith, seize it and hold it by one tremendous effort, in spite of every difficulty in the mind. As I realised that, I asked myself if I had strength for the effort. I remembered my sins. I felt my infamy and guilt. I was conscious of a great need for a Saviour. *Then* I knew I had strength for the effort.

"There was a call at the end of the meeting for those who felt their need of a Saviour to stand up and make their Decision then and there. I stood up. The very act of getting up, publicly getting up, and by the very fact of standing up publicly confessing my need for a Saviour, seemed to change my whole nature. At that moment I was converted. There is no question about it, no getting away from the fact, and no possibility of thinking that I deceived myself. And I will tell you why I say that.

If only my ordinary sins had ceased from that moment I might perhaps be tempted to think that just deep emotion produced some kind of change in my mind which a psychologist could explain. But something much more wonderful occurred to me, and occurred *instantaneously*—something that no psychologist can explain, and no psychologist, unless he is a Christian, can understand. From that moment my temper departed, like a devil cast out by the power of God.

"That was what staggered me, and even now, all these long years afterwards, I look back with amazement on that tremendous miracle. For I believe truly that I was one of the hottest-tempered men that ever lived. My temper was infinitely worse than all my other sins lumped together. I was sensual enough, God knows, but not everlastingly ; there were periods when the very thought of such sins disgusted me and made me feel sick ; I was never wholly unconscious of the pleasure which comes from wholesome exercise and manly sports and clean habits. But my temper was the very core of me. It was my life's blood, the beat of my heart, the pulsation of my brain. I simply couldn't brook interference. Authority was galling to me. A man had only to offer me the slightest insult to get my fist in his face. As to forgiving an injury—why, I should have laughed at such a thing.

"But conversion changed me—instantaneously, mind you—into absolute peace of mind. I lost all sense of heat and tempest and obstruction. Life was clear sailing. I could see far ahead of me, and was easy in my mind, as easy as a little child.

"To show you how complete was the change. At this time my old friend joined a society which worked for abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. Men who belonged to it wore in their button-holes a little blue ribbon with a white line down the centre. Well, he got me to join. I had liked drink, and I was a great smoker; but I experienced no difficulty in giving up both these habits. I wore the ribbon in my coat. Immediately, I became the target for jokes among the other men at the office. They saw I was converted, lost their former fear of me, and took advantage of my religion to tease and chaff and even mock me. Well, I never minded it in the least. And only a few days before, mind you, I should have been all over them in a moment!"

He smiled and looked at me with the very straight gaze of a hard-punching man, the teeth locked, the chin protruded, a nod of the head giving emphasis to the words, "I should have been all over them in a moment."

The strange story of this man's eventful life does not end with his conversion. He became a member of a London church, and there fell in with a beautiful and noble girl for whom he speedily contracted a great affection. She was destined to exert a remarkable influence on his life.

There was in her rich and noble nature something of that depth and mysticism which make the earliest women of Methodism as beautiful in modern eyes as the most enchanting of the medieval saints. Her whole character had the spiritual atmosphere of *Adam Bede*. To the sweetness and humanity of

her nature was added a profound tenderness, an almost sorrowful beauty of faith which conferred upon her presence and breathed from her personality something sacred and exalted. In the midst of modern London, surrounded by all the vulgarity and coarseness of our period, this noble girl lived an existence of beauty and tranquillity.

As soon as he became engaged to such an inspiring creature, the man was filled with desire for a wider and more splendid life. London became oppressive to him. The darkness, the poverty, the tragedy, the sunken degradation, misery, and destitution which crowd upon the soul from every side of the vast unhappy city, grew intolerable to his heart and brain.

"I could feel Canada calling to me," he said, "just as if it was a human being calling to me by name across the sea. Honestly, it was just like a voice, a human voice. And I longed to go, simply longed to shake the dust of London off my feet, and get out there at once—into the big, wholesome land with its pure air and its clean skies."

He told his desire to her whom it most concerned. He was surprised to find that she made no appeal for him to stay. Her dark, haunting eyes regarded him with quiet searching for a moment, and then she said, "Yes, go; it is a good move; it will bring a blessing." He spoke of his hopes about getting land near the railway, hundreds of acres of land, and making a comfortable income as a farmer; they would be wonderfully happy together. She smiled, and listened, and said nothing till the end. Then she said to him, "Will

you promise me one thing?—Whatever happens to you, good fortune or bad fortune, promise me that you will never lose your faith. *Keep believing. Keep believing.*" She smiled at him, and added, "That is our motto, yours over there and mine waiting here. *Keep believing!*"

A friend of his had the same inclination towards Canada. This man was a fine and splendid character, just the very partner one would desire for a new venture. He was an ordinary upright and professing Christian, but had never experienced a profound change of heart. For the rest, he was a steady, moral, industrious, and ambitious man—the very salt of those who carry England's best traditions into other lands.

The two started together. Arrived in Canada, one went one way and one the other, prospecting for land. The man whose story I am telling was struck down by an attack of rheumatic fever soon after this separated quest had begun. Letters from the saint in England had regularly arrived with two little capitals in the corner of the envelope—"K.B." And at the end of each letter those same two capitals always appeared below the signature, the last message from her soul. The man took to his bed, determined to keep his promise. His letters and envelopes, too, had always carried that signal back to England. He was strong and steadfast. At all costs, he would Keep Believing.

The time came when fever carried his consciousness into the region of delirium. He was lying in the bedroom of an hotel that had not long been built and yet was almost as old as the town in

which it flourished. His bedroom window opened on the public square. All day long a procession of vehicles passed across this centre of a new market. At night, when the whole place blazed with electric light, the square was very often discordant with drunken voices and the sound of degradation striving to sing itself into happiness.

The man who had put on the whole armour of Christ lay and tossed on his bed, doctors and nurses watching the struggle of his soul.

One afternoon familiar music came to his ears. He listened intently. The music became clear. He realised that it was close at hand, just outside and below his window. He had no notion why he lay in bed, nor where he was; but he listened to the music, glad that it was so near. It was a hymn. Above the din of the band he could hear the voices of men and women, singing words which he knew by heart.

"I don't know how to tell you what that hymn did for me," he said thoughtfully. "It was something very quiet and beautiful; it seemed to flow into my soul with a message of peace, and to touch me, at the very heart of my being, with the thought of God's Presence. I seemed too, at that very moment, to know all that had happened to me. I turned to the nurse and asked what band was playing. She replied, 'Oh, it's only one of those Missions; does it worry you?' I smiled, and said, 'No; it doesn't worry me.' Then I closed my eyes and lay thinking.

"Without any excitement or wonder in my mind, I knew then and there what I had got to do.

Without surprise, I found that all my plans and ambitions had vanished. I accepted, without the smallest demur, my new destiny. And it seemed the most beautiful thing that had come to me. I was going to give up everything, embrace poverty, and become a missioner.

" The next day as I lay in bed, with closed eyes, thinking of this new life, I heard the doctors whispering together and expressing doubts as to my recovery. I learned afterwards that it was a special consultation ; there were no fewer than five doctors, for I was on the very verge of death. I opened my eyes, looked at the doctors, smiled, and said, ' Don't be anxious ; I'm not going to die ; my life has only just begun ! ' It was no utterance of delirium. I remember saying it. And I meant it. I felt that I had been born again.

" Directly I got well, and was able to walk, I went to the local Mission and offered myself for service. I wrote home and told the news. I knew that whatever happened, however it was received, I should have to go on. I looked that sacrifice in the face, and was prepared to make it. Everything seemed ordered for me, as if it must be and had to be.

" One thing puzzled me, and that concerned my friend. He had not returned, nor sent me a line. I wanted to write and tell him of this great alteration in my ideas, to prepare him for the change in his plans which, of course, it entailed ; but I didn't know where to find him.

" Then a strange thing, an extraordinary thing, occurred. My friend arrived and announced that

he had abandoned all idea of farming, *as he had been greatly influenced by the same Mission in British Columbia and intended to give up his life to that service.* While I had come to a similar resolution in Eastern Canada, he—unconverted till that moment—had surrendered to the same influence in Western Canada, nearly four thousand miles away! We had both gone to Canada, keen and ambitious young men, to make our fortunes, and thinking of little else. We had discussed again and again our plans, our schemes, our hopes. We had talked grain, stock, implements, and labour for months together. And now—at our first meeting after a separation to fulfil all these fine dreams—we each discovered that the other partner had determined to become a missioner!

"When I received the anxiously awaited letter from home I was still further startled by the mysterious. She knew I should not become a farmer, she wrote, and she knew that I would become a missioner. She had been perfectly certain of this before I started, and it was what she herself desired above anything else. But there was bad news in this letter as well. Her parents would not hear of her marriage to a missioner, and would not permit her to become a missioner either in England or Canada. However, she comforted me by saying that everything would presently work out as we both wished, and she concluded with a strong and underlined 'K.B.,' which now had an interpretation for my heart as well as for my soul. I tell you I clung to that 'K.B.' with both hands!

"And all turned out well. Her parents yielded; I sent home the money for her passage; and she came out to me, longing, simply longing, for the work. She made a magnificent sister of mercy. For nearly nine years we lived and laboured in America, getting to know the human heart and the tragedy of life as neither of us knew it before, for our work lay among the broken men of all classes who turn to a religious Mission for help when they get right down to rock level. We worked both in Canada and the States. Sometimes it was thrilling work; sometimes encouraging; sometimes *heart-breaking;* but all through my wife was simply splendid, and absolutely gave herself up to it. Her faith—well, I've never come across anything like it. It seems as if she *knows* what God is going to do."

The rest of the story is an uneventful history of development and progress. An opportunity for very much more extended and responsible work among outcasts and miserables presented itself after these nine years in America.

For eight years the man was a great and steady force in an agency which deals with social failures. By his influence the entirely social and humanitarian nature of this work was given a religious consecration. He did a noble work among thousands and tens of thousands of unhappy people.

And now he occupies a high and responsible position in one of the great trading concerns of the empire; but one of those undertakings which even while they remain purely commercial play an enormous part in the restoration of fallen and degraded manhood. His work still lies with helping the weak.

"No one," he once said to me, speaking of his life's work, "could see such misery and wreckage as I have seen, and am likely to see till the end of my days, without coming to the conclusion that the most serious thing in the whole world is *sin*. People who make light of sin can really know nothing of the world. Its consequences are something frightful. They cannot be exaggerated. And it's not only such obvious things as drink, gambling, and sensuality in general, but what are called spiritual sins—pride, selfishness, snobbery, vanity, and miserliness—they, too, very often, more often than people think, drag human nature down into dirty water, very dirty water.

"And I'll tell you something else I'm certain about, after a pretty long and varied experience. The very means which society employs to minister to misery, *without religion*, can be turned by misery against society, for its own undoing. Take, for one instance, the model, municipal, and charitable lodging-houses which are now being set up all over the place. On the face of it they are perfectly splendid; nothing could be better; compared with the old and horrible doss-house they are like heaven. But go inside, talk to the men you find there! Do you think they want to reform? Not they! Do you think they are conscious of shame? Not a bit of it! Do you think they are making a single effort to become good and useful citizens? Not one in a hundred! Why?—because it's all made so very cheap and comfortable for them. A man can nowadays slip away from his wife and children, burrow into one of these fine houses, be lost to all

who know him, and support himself quite easily, like a prince, on an hour's work in the market or three hours' cadging in the streets. They live better, these fellows, a jolly sight better, than the honest workman who has to rent a house and support a family.

"Religion is the one means whereby a man can be changed from bad to good. Charity can change him from poor to rich; philanthropy can change him from hungry to filled; county councils and local rates can change him from homeless to housed; but nothing except religion can change him from bad to good. Let society try, and see if they can do it.

"And, of course, I don't mean a merely formal religion. That's not a bit of good; indeed, I really think it's worse than useless—for it angers and embitters miserable and degraded men, it makes them mock. But the religion that goes straight for the heart of a man, that tells him his peril, that is not content with a lip profession of faith, but insists on a cleansed heart, a changed nature, and a converted soul—that's the religion which alone can lift the fallen and restore the lost.

"It seems to me that some people are afraid to say anything nowadays of the chief thing that makes religion a living fact and the supreme mystery of existence. *They're afraid of the miracle.*

"Why! without conversion religion is nothing more than a philosophy. And imagine taking philosophy into a prison, a lodging-house, a gin-palace, or a brothel!

"But you can take Christ there."

CHAPTER VI

THE PROFESSIONAL AMATEUR

THERE is a precision about this man which is bracing and invigorating. He holds his head well, is fresh-coloured, keen-looking, has a trick of voice which is penetrating and incisive, speaks to the point, is alert and watchful. You imagine that he never yawns. You cannot picture him collapsed and dishevelled in a chair. As I talked to him it occurred to me that an ingenious treatise might be written on the Psychology of a Rigid Backbone.

As a boy he must have been one of those of whom nurses say that "it pays to wash." I am not satisfied to declare of him as a man that he is well groomed; I desire to add that he is well tubbed or well soaped. He has the appearance of one fresh from the Turkish bath and more than ready for a meal. A keen man.

As certainly as the profession of priest or soldier sets its seal upon a man's countenance, the profession of the law has set its seal upon the face of this fresh-coloured and trenchant gentleman of my story. He is a barrister. One could never mistake him for merchant or doctor or engineer.

The tale of his life is what one would expect from his appearance, save for one incident, and even that

is not bold in the miracle. He looks like a professional man who from the first has kept a straight course, who has never turned aside by the breadth of a hair from the goal of his ambition, and who will continue to his life's end the fixed and rigid habits of his mind. It would not easily occur to a casual observer that this man is an amateur minister of religion, or that his whole life is consecrated by religious idealism. It certainly would not occur to a casual observer that this alert and vigorous man devotes a great part of his life to saving his fellow-creatures from sin, and that he has been the human means of rescuing many from the greatest peril of soul.

He came to London from a country home, and settled down in chambers to prepare for the Bar. The home was religious. He was born and bred a Churchman, and remains a Churchman to the present day. But at the time of his coming to London religion was only one of his good habits. He had no enthusiasm for the subject. He had really never deeply considered it.

Among the men with whom he came into contact were many who had no sense of religion at all, and were disposed to live very much in defiance of religious principles. Untempted by these men, and as much shocked by the carelessness with which they prosecuted their studies as by the general moral tone of their characters, he was conscious in their society of a feeling of loneliness and isolation.

He was distinctly unhappy.

There was, apparently, no risk that he would form coarse or vulgar habits, no peril that he would

fall into actual sin. But in the society of these men who were entirely without the sense of seriousness, whose conversation was rather base and contemptible, who were given to gambling and the sin which some suppose is inevitable to youth in crowded cities, he was exposed to the risk of an indirect contamination, and might easily have come to entertain views of religion disastrous to a really noble life.

His story helps one to see clearly a truth often obscured by crude thinking. Sin is not beaten only when it is withstood; the dangers of bad influence are by no means confined to the seduction of souls into acts of sin; it is possible for a man to be pure, honest, upright, and industrious, and yet corrupted by iniquity. And this indeed is one of the first lessons that a wise man would impress upon the mind of a son whom he greatly loved. He would warn him against that contagion of sin which, while it leaves the heart unspotted, paralyses the activities of the soul. How many men live reputable and moral lives, in whom the soul is almost destroyed, or at any rate completely paralysed? I think the host of such men is well-nigh as numerous as the host of reckless wrong-doers. And the life of their soul has been thus poisoned or destroyed by the contamination of surrounding iniquity—the atmosphere in which sin thrives of a flippant frivolity, a wholesale irresponsibility, a contempt for the religious life, an indifference to the whole region of spirit. They consider that it is no good to think about God and no use to bother themselves with the open question of immortality. And so imagina-

tion withers at its roots, existence dwindles to the petty round of the individual ambition, and the mind shuts and bolts its doors against mystery.

Difficult is it for such men to understand the meaning of Maeterlinck's thought—"It is not unreasonable to believe that the paramount interest of life, all that is truly lofty and remarkable in the destiny of man, reposes almost entirely in the mystery that surrounds us."

It is no exaggeration, but a veritable truth of existence, to say that the hobbies, fads, and recreations of respectable people may be just as destructive of the spiritual life as the crimes and excesses of the disreputable. A man whose whole life is absorbed in the cult of old china, the growing of roses, the breeding of dogs, or the collection of postage-stamps will suffer as utterly in his spiritual existence as the man abandoned to sensuality. In one case the soul is murdered; in the other it is starved.

The danger of this particular man was not moral, but spiritual. He had none of those propulsions towards vice which drive other men so easily into vulgar sins. His nature, one might almost say, was sinless. Sin had no attraction for him. He was untempted. There was in his nature a fineness of feeling, a delicacy of refinement, which held him not merely free from sin, but superior to sin. Still, he was in peril. The society into which he was thrown had strength enough to destroy in a more Christian man than this the beauty and the purity and the enthusiasm of the religious life. He might easily have abandoned church-going, forgotten that he possessed a Bible, given up the habit of

prayer, and drifted into the dull and inactive ranks of agnosticism, or at any rate of indifference.

He was in a rather depressed and unhappy state of mind, when he came across a man of his own age who happened to introduce the subject of religion into their conversation. This man mentioned certain churches in London, certain preachers, and suggested that they should go together on the following Sunday to hear a particular man. A friendship was in this way established, and the feeling of loneliness somewhat abated in the mind of the young barrister. But he was, nevertheless, afflicted from time to time by a sense of something lacking in his life, some void which at present nothing had begun to fill. He sought by regular attendance at church, by earnest prayer, and by industry at his work, to get rid of this uneasiness of mind. Sometimes he thought he had succeeded. But eventually the feeling returned—a feeling of vague unrest.

His friend spoke to him one day of certain men actively engaged in the work of the Young Men's Christian Association at Exeter Hall in the Strand. He became interested, and expressed a desire to visit the hall and make acquaintance with the work of the Association. The very first experience of this company induced him to become a member of the Association, and he at once began to take a quiet and humble part in the missionary adventures of the Brotherhood. He was happy in having found congenial companionships, and still happier in having discovered a field for work.

From the young barristers who surrounded his

life he came in for the usual amount of banter and ridicule. It was sometimes hard to bear, but never intolerable. It was irritating and annoying, but not cruel.

Something in this chaffing opposition of the world prevented him, apparently, from losing all sense of self in the work of the Association. He was by no means conscious of doubt, by no means tempted towards infidelity; but, thoroughly believing and earnestly working, he was aware of the world and conscious in his soul of something he knew not what which came between himself and peace.

The one incident in his religious experience which touches the miracle occurred at this period. He was walking swiftly and happily one day to a meeting of the Association, when he suddenly felt himself stopped in the street, and found himself cross-examined, as it were, by his own soul. There in the London streets, jostled by a procession of passers-by, he stopped dead, and his soul asked him a question: Was he going to that meeting to hear an address, to meet friends, to pass his time away? or was he going there because he belonged to Christ and desired to serve Him?

Such was the question that faced him as he stood in the street, and would not let him go on till it was answered. Those acquainted with the varieties of religious experience will recognise in this arrest of the whole body by a sudden activity of the conscience the features of a common occurrence. A self divided, if it be but dimly aware of the division, dimly conscious of two influences in the mind, can never rest, never be satisfied, till the

soul has decided one way or the other. The word *decision* is one of the most important in the literature of religious experience. It is almost a synonym for conversion. There is in the soul of a man once awake to religious impulses, but still resting his head on the pillow of his former habits, a hunger and a longing for decision which presses for satisfaction with enormous weight on the whole of the moral nature. The soul feels the need for absolute decision, but cannot bring itself to rise and stand upright. It fences and prevaricates. It turns this way and that, to think it over. But the pressure increases. Up !—up !—nothing will happen while you lie still ; come to the penitent form, stand up in the midst of the meeting, or kneel down here in the solitude of your room—*anything* so long as it is action, *anything* so long as it is decision, *anything* so long as it is not meditation, vacillation, a balancing of this and that.

I have heard from the lips of numerous men, representing many classes in the community and many degrees of culture, the phrase, " When I decided for Christ. . . ." Until I heard it from real men, whose souls woke in me a sincere admiration, I had the feeling of one who hears a sharp discord, or who is offended by a coarse accent. It vexed me. It irritated me. It seemed to me akin to cant. But my experience of men and my reading of books have brought me to know that the word *decision* expresses, as well as human language ever can express the things of the spirit, one of the most common and one of the most striking needs of the human soul. And I believe thoroughly that

what the world calls "unrest" is the inevitable condition of the soul of man until it has arisen from the distractions of the world and decided for the laws of God. The price of the attempt to serve two masters is unrest. Even if the decision be resolutely made for the world, unrest will depart. To decide for God means, as is amply proved in the crowded chronicles of religious experience, the attainment of peace and an impulse towards personal service.

This barrister tells me that as he stood in the London street, confronted by the question of his soul, he received the assurance that Christ came first in his life. He does not know how to express his sensation in words. He says he felt himself pass "from death unto life," and when I ask him if he can find words outside the language of metaphor, ordinary and natural words, to express his experience, he says frankly that he knows of none. And he is emphatic in his protest that the language of metaphor accurately expresses the sensation of his soul. It was a feeling of having passed from one state of being to another, from a state of death to a state of life, a feeling of resurrection and vital existence, a glorious and illuming sensation of the Personal Love of a Personal God.

So real was this feeling, he tells me, that he went back next day to the very spot where he had stopped in the streets and said to himself, "Here, yesterday, by the grace of God, I was converted and born again." Many years have gone by since then. The world has prospered with him. He is a married man, with the care of children on his hands. But,

he tells me, in the midst of many and great activities, that single incident stands out clear and vivid in his mind, and for evermore that stone in the pavement will be for him most sacred ground.

Soon after this experience the branch of the Association whose meetings he attended received a visit from Sir George Williams. The barrister tells me that he was greatly struck at the time by the simple fact that Mr. Williams, as he then was, had come at considerable inconvenience to himself, and would have to depart at six o'clock the next morning to fulfil another engagement. He reflected on this fact, and it led him to see that men who devoted themselves to religion, who really lived the life of a Christian, counted no cost in the service of Christ. This reflection worked in his soul. At the same meeting an address was given by Mr. Hind Smith on the text, *To me to live is Christ.* The idea contained in this address of service and devotion, ceaseless service and passionate devotion, haunted the barrister for weeks and months.

He learned soon afterwards, he says, to show his colours. "To stand on the street," he says, with a smile, "where one was well known, and invite the passing young men to the meetings, was not always pleasant to the flesh, but it was good discipline, and not without its use in character building."

There was a feeling of joy that he had given himself to Christ, that his colours were at last firmly nailed to the mast, that the irrevocable step had now been taken boldly and certainly. But he had his moments when he rather shrank from the ordeal of public activity and public demonstra-

tion; smiling, he tells one that sometimes it was necessary to make a great effort.

His spiritual life, however, was deepening and intensifying. He learned at this period to believe with a really profound faith in the power of prayer. The incident which produced this particular effect upon his mind may appear trivial and unconvincing to many people; but to the man himself it had a marked significence.

"The extension of the work of the Association," he says, "had necessitated a new building. When all available funds had been collected there still remained a substantial debt. The situation was rather serious. At a meeting of the Committee one of the members proposed that they should all give up their business for a whole day and devote it to prayer for the removal of the debt. Now, it is a strange thing but true, that a certain merchant at that time made his will, and, quite unknown to any of the Committee, left one-fourth of his residuary estate to the Association, subject to his wife's life-interest. Soon after the making of this will he died; but his widow was destined to live for many years. The will, however, did not suit her, as she desired to become absolute owner of her husband's money. In the end, with the sanction of the Court, the widow bought up the reversionary interests, and the amount payable to the Association was just enough to cover the outstanding mortgage debt."

He tells me of one or two incidents in his career as a worker for the Association which have greatly impressed him.

A young man once came to the meetings of the Association who appeared to be very unhappy and distressed in his mind. He told the barrister that he was a valet to Lord ——, that his situation was a good one, that nothing troubled him about his future, but that for many weeks he had been in much anxiety about his soul. Somehow, he said, the peace which he sought eluded him.

It was a case of unrest, proceeding from indecision. He wanted to surrender his soul to Christ, but certain considerations, more or less intellectual, held him in check. He could not be quite sure whether he believed the Bible. Certain arguments he had heard troubled him.

One evening a few members of the Association interested in the young man remained talking with him after a meeting, striving to settle his intellectual doubts and doing all they could by persuasion to make the man surrender. They not only talked with him, but there in the room knelt and prayed with him. It was useless. He acknowledged the cogency of their arguments, professed himself unworthy of their kindness, but said that he could not yet bring himself to take the plunge.

At this point the barrister turned aside and wrote on a piece of paper the words, "*I now* REJECT *the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour.*" He then passed the paper to the young man and suggested that he should sign it. The poor fellow read the words, started, and said, No, he would not sign it—much wondering at the suggestion. The barrister took back the piece of paper, turned it over, and wrote on the other side, "*I now* ACCEPT *the Lord Jesus*

Christ as MY *Saviour.*" Then he passed it to the man, saying nothing. For a moment he hesitated after reading the words ; then with a kind of spring of suddenness he took a pen and wrote his name underneath. In the act of signing he was conscious of liberation.

Within a very few days of this end to his spiritual wretchedness he was arrested on a charge of stealing some sleeve-links belonging to his master. He was brought before a magistrate and sent for trial. A previous employer happened to see a report of the proceedings in the newspaper, and convinced of the man's innocence at once went and bailed him out. He then took steps, at his own expense, to get Mr. Montagu Williams instructed for the defence. At the trial, however, the whole case collapsed. The jury stated that they did not wish to hear the defence, and the innocent man was instantly acquitted.

The barrister told me that he was greatly impressed by the man's quiet confidence and singular calm all through this most trying and testing time of trouble. "Not a word of complaint," he said, "passed his lips as to the false charge, but many expressions of gratitude for God's faithfulness to him in that time of heavy trial. I constantly met him in after years, and the last occasion I saw him was in Hyde Park taking part in a religious meeting."

He told me that he had known scores of men whose lives had been entirely changed, some of them completely revolutionised, by contact with the Association. He mentions a certain squire in the

south of England who has given up a life of sport and pleasure to devote himself entirely to the missionary work of the Association; a barrister, who had been "more than a little wild at the 'Varsity," who became a worker for the Association while he was in London reading for the Bar, and who since his father's death has lived in the country, "where he administers justice from the county bench and astonishes his fellow-justices with his outspoken Christianity"; a prominent surgeon of the present day, who joined the Association as a medical student, worked exceedingly hard for it, and keeps up his connection to the present day; a young London solicitor, who, influenced by Moody's Mission in 1884, came to the Association "with a view of getting some Christian work," and has ever since been an active member; an architect, by no means unknown, who joined the Association many years ago and ascribes "much of his Christian development and character to his connection with and work in the Association"; a young country lawyer, in London for the last years of his articles, who then joined the Association, and is now "well known in a West-country town as an out-and-out Christian and is always willing to testify to the definite blessing and help he got at the Association in his London days."

And then he says: "Others I could name who for a time ran well and then fell off, but the falling off always came after they had severed their connection with the Association."

He told me of one rather remarkable incident in his experience of the Association's work. At a

certain meeting held in the Strand three men from the country passing along the street were persuaded to come in. They were obliged to leave before the close of the meeting, in order to catch a train at King's Cross. Within a week a letter arrived at the Association's quarters in the Strand, addressed to "The Chairman of the Meeting." It was written by one of the three men, and told that while two of them had been willing, as Christian men, to attend the meeting, the third had held back at first and had only consented at last on the persuasions of his friends. At the meeting, however, this man heard something that touched his heart, and there and then "gave himself to Christ." In the train, on their way home, the three countrymen rejoiced together in a common enthusiasm for the religious life. In less than a week the man who had surrendered himself at the meeting was dead.

The barrister told me why he remains an active worker for the Association, in spite of his loyalty as a Churchman.

"The Association brings one," he said, "into intimate communion with men of all denominations, and gives one in this way a broadness of outlook which is withheld, I think, from those who have not known work outside their own church. I count this right adjustment—Christian first, Churchman second. A man gets a most useful knowledge of the world-wide influence and appeal of Christianity by mixing with Christians of all the various churches and chapels. No proselytising takes place. The members are united on the essentials of Christianity, and the Association may be said to represent the

Church of Christ in its spirit of brotherhood which is superior to mere differences of opinion, and which unites men of the most opposite Churchmanship in a missionary unanimity for the essentials of religion.

"Another great advantage of the Association, one which every young man starting life ought to take into account, is the opportunity it affords for the formation of noble friendships. You meet men of most classes in the Association, and among them a man will always find those with whom he can associate in his social life, and who may very likely be most helpful to him in his professional or business career. Several of my friendships date back twenty-five and even thirty years in connection with Association work.

"Finally, there is the immense advantage of finding in the Association a field of active service. And this service, so important to the development of spiritual life, differs materially from that of one's own church. With the latter it is a specified work, such as a Sunday-school class, and done at a specified time. There is something of machinery about it. On the other hand, the Association teaches a man that he is always on duty, as it were—particularly in the sphere of his own daily calling. The outcome of this is individual dealing, fishing for men in all waters—a form of service which brings more success and more joy than any other. The open-air work, evangelistic work, Bible study, and the like, all combine to make one open one's mouth in public—not only in testimony, but also, in a measure, in teaching and preaching."

His own life is devoted in this way to the service of his Master.

The reflective reader will consider what might have happened to this man if he had drifted into a condition of indifference and had never felt it his duty to lift a finger for religion. He might have remained scrupulously moral, but would his life have been so useful or his heart so restful ?

He gave me above every other impression the feeling that in active work for Christianity there is a pleasure and a satisfaction which, besides developing the spiritual life—that life which demands a perpetual culture and a particular atmosphere—adds enormously to the mere interest and adventure of human existence. He struck me as one of the happiest men I have ever encountered. He enjoys the work of amateur missionary with an almost athletic zest, and few things give him so much pleasure, he tells me, as occasionally forgathering with his friends of the Association and talking over old times and old strivings for the souls of men.

For the man who does nothing to spread the glory of the Kingdom of God he has a sorrowful pity—such a compassion as Cicero may have had for the dumb and Shakespeare for the blind. And yet, remember, he began life with no taste for such work ; he had to drive himself to it at the beginning with a great effort of the will.

We think these things are decided for us by temperament. But character is made by the decision of the will.

Quo vadis ?

CHAPTER VII

A SOUL IN THE STREET

ONLY a reader who is not afraid to explore the dark and innermost recesses of a morbid mind, and to behold naked before his eyes the soul of one whom science would perhaps describe as a degenerate, should give himself the trouble of perusing this present chapter. For I confess at the outset it is a tale of extraordinary gloom, a most morbid and dismal story—one of those psychological autobiographies which a healthy man will probably read with increasing aversion and disgust only to find that he has taken into his memory a haunting and unforgettable unpleasantness. It is like a story by Guy de Maupassant, or a visit to the dissecting-room of a hospital. One shudders, turns away with relief, but never forgets.

Why, then, do I tell the tale ? Is it not a useless task to which I address myself ?—something which can do no good to anybody ?

" *Useless,*" writes Myers, " is a pre-scientific, even an anti-scientific term, which has perhaps proved a greater stumbling-block to research in psychology than in any other science. In science the *use* of phenomena is to prove laws, and the more bizarre and trivial the phenomena, the greater the chance

of their directing us to some law which has been overlooked till now." Properly regarded, nothing in life is either trivial or without significance.

And not only this. The longer one lives and the more one becomes acquainted with the secrets of the human mind, the less one is inclined to divide men into the ranks of normal and abnormal. I should be glad if I could think the man of this story was solitary in the midst of London's millions, or that he was one of a little, ill-starred brotherhood moving through the obscure shadows with envy of the happier multitude. But I am persuaded that he represents a considerable host of human beings, and I am strongly disposed to think that this host will not diminish but increase, while the tendency of mankind to coagulate in vast masses continues to impoverish the fields and pack the unnatural cities. These unhappy men, I mean, are manufactured by a civilisation which tends to become every day more careless of the laws of nature.

It is certainly well that those able to contemplate the tragic depths of the human mind should read such a tale as this, read it, reflect upon it, and consider what may best be done for those suffering in like case ; but I even go so far as to say that the very people whom I warn against the reading of it would probably broaden their sympathies and usefully enlarge their knowledge of existence, if they persuade their intelligence to take the place of their prejudices and read the story as a man of science would examine a problem in physics. With this warning I proceed to tell the tale.

He is a man of medium stature, thin, but broad-shouldered, with a worn and troubled face, to which, it would seem, smiles had never come, even in childhood. The complexion is the dusty grey of London's indoor population, a pallor which has no freshness, an anæmic condition which is without the refining sense of disease; no amount of soap and water could give this pallor the appearance of cleanliness; it is like a face that has been washed, but dried with a dirty towel.

The head is finely shaped, but disproportionately large for the flat-chested and starved-looking body. The hair grows thickly and stands upright. The eyebrows are as heavy as a sybarite's moustache; the moustache is like a Frenchman's beard. Surrounded on every side by this bushy hair, the large eyes, set deep in their sockets, look sadly and pathetically forth from under the heavy eave of the white brow, and through eyeglasses which are stained and smudged. They would be beautiful eyes but for their look of woe, which dulls the brightness of the brown iris, and robs the whole expression of animation and vitality. One sees that the soul is never near the surface, never pressing its face close to the windows of its tenement; it is far away, busy at the back of the house, and obsessed by internal problems; only from thence does it strain occasionally to see what is taking place out of doors.

He sits very quietly, looking smaller than he really is; the head sinks a little towards the breast; the hands are clasped over one of the knees which is crossed upon the other leg; the thick eyebrows are raised high in the wrinkled forehead. He speaks

in a low and even voice, like a man who has just suffered a great bereavement. His frankness increases as he proceeds; he is amazingly pitiless towards himself; he becomes in his quiet and restrained manner earnestly self-analytical; he is interested as an outsider in the commotion which distracts him; he asks advice, and discusses remedies.

The quiet of the man is astonishing. He reminds me of Victor Hugo's description of Villemain—"he was rather disordered-looking, but gentle and earnest." In a man troubled, as I found him to be troubled, one looks for excitability, self-conscious nervousness, and that condition which we describe as jumpiness. But he is like a man under the influence of morphia.

He occupies a position of importance in a firm of chartered accountants. He is not only a clever and trustworthy clerk, but an able man. In the City of London many people know him as an excellent fellow. This position, as the story will show, has been won entirely by his own efforts.

One of his greatest friends is a member of the Young Men's Christian Association. It was this friend who, having told me something, but only a small part, of his story, brought us together. As soon as we were alone, the man said to me, "You have heard how I started life?"

"So-and-so," I replied, "has told me that you had a hard time in boyhood."

He looked at me for a time, and then said, without any emotion or the least sign of feeling, "I am what is called an illegitimate. I never saw my father, and to this day I don't even know his name.

I should like now to hear something about him. I am interested in heredity. It might explain things which are difficult to understand. My mother, I must tell you, was quite a poor woman.

"She lived in Finchley, and just before I was born went to lodge at the house of a foreman printer in Westminster Bridge Road. As soon after my birth as possible she went back to her people, and left me to the care of the printer and his wife. I suppose she must have paid something down, or perhaps she contributed a certain sum to the weekly expenses. I never heard. She went away, and when I was old enough to ask questions I wasn't sufficiently interested to inquire. She came to see me from time to time. I liked her, but never regarded her as my mother. Since those days I have been able to support her. But she lives far away; we do not see each other.

"For me, my parents were the foreman printer and his wife. I called them 'father' and 'mother,' and they treated me almost as well as they treated their own son, who was a year or two my senior. Their house in Westminster Bridge Road was my home. Their son was my brother.

"How my life would have gone but for that son I do not dare to speculate. His father and mother were kind to me—kind as one is kind to a dog or a cat; but they took no pains to discover my thoughts, to guide my inclinations, or to shape my character. They taught me morals by saying, 'Don't do that,' or 'You mustn't do this.' They never told me a single word about God and the soul. They never looked into my mind.

"It is a great puzzle to me how their son got his notion of religion. Perhaps he was born with it. I can remember how he would say to me, when we were talking about temptations, 'I never feel anything like that; I can't understand how anyone can sin; I was born good and always shall be good." He used to laugh when he said it, just as if he were some spirit or a fairy, flashing his eyes at me, putting his arm round my neck, and drawing me close to his side with what was almost a gay affection. There was something strange about the boy. In some ways he was much more like a girl. He was never rough or boisterous. He never wanted any horse-play. He was gentle and clinging, and had something in his nature which was positively maternal. He used to take me on his knees when I was quite a little chap, and tell me about God, the angels, heaven, and the life of Christ. We would sit like that on the doorstep, the traffic going by all the time, till it was bedtime. . . .

"Later in my boyhood he encouraged me to pray with great earnestness, and taught me the urgent need of deciding to give my life to religion. I don't remember if he used the word conversion. He used to speak about *making up the mind, deciding, making certain* how one was going to live. Perhaps he got these ideas from his Sunday-school. What strikes me now in thinking about those days is the motherliness of my foster-brother. He was really as tender as any woman. And there was something radiant about him.

"He was certainly a very remarkable boy; but I dare say that if we knew all the facts of his ancestry,

and all the circumstances of his childhood, we should see that there was nothing particular in his natural religiousness.

"As soon as he was able to leave school his father apprenticed him to a firm of electrical engineers. Of course I could not expect such luck for myself, and I went out soon afterwards to shift for myself as an errand-boy.

"That's rather a strange life. I often look at little chaps of twelve and thirteen, hurrying up to the City with a packet of sandwiches under their arms—little beggars beginning the great struggle of life in London. I wonder what they are thinking about. I wonder if they are fighting temptations. People often forget that a boy has a battle in his soul as big as any man's. And they're pitchforked straight out of school into the very middle of London. . . . Well, they hear things and see things, as well as feel the strange things that move about in the human brain. A little boy thrown into the midst of London is exposed to many serious risks—big risks.

"I'll be quite frank with you. I should have gone straight to the devil but for my foster-brother. As it was I went some considerable way in that direction. I fought hard. I put up a real fight. But I was beaten again and again. So passed my boyhood. I grew into my youth without any enthusiasm for life. I felt tired and fagged out before I was twenty.

"There's no doubt at all that my salvation, so far as a man in my case can ever dare to talk about salvation, came from the Young Men's Christian

Association. My foster-brother persuaded me to become a member. He told me about the educational classes, encouraged me to be ambitious, and assured me—for I used to tell him about my temptations—that I should get strength from the religious meetings of the Association. So I joined. It proved a great blessing to me. First of all, the religious meetings really did help me. I got from them a decided bent towards religion, and set myself to obtain, if possible, the miraculous change of heart which follows conversion. I am one of those men, I must tell you, who feel themselves converted again and again. I have had moments in which hell seemed to drop away from me, shrivelled up at my feet, and left me free. For weeks and months I have lived as if I was in communion with God, quite happy, and quite untempted. Then—well, the darkness has returned. But I must tell you about that later on, if you care to hear about it.

"I made great strides in the educational classes. In a few months I was able to take a place as a clerk. I learnt everything I possibly could. I was keen, not only for the sake of getting on in the world, but for the sake of getting away from myself. Religion, education, physical culture, the games and meetings and discussions of the Association—I welcomed all alike, as distractions from my wretched self.

"I should like you to know one thing about the Association, which perhaps other people haven't told you. Men of all classes, except the manual labourer, are members, and some of the first people in the land come to the meetings and mix freely with the rest. You find aristocrats, prominent bankers, famous

merchants, and officers of the army mixing with clerks and shop-assistants, with a real spirit of friendship and brotherhood. Now, to a young fellow placed as I was placed, born in dishonour and starting life as an errand-boy, those friendships, those acts of kindness I received from great people, had a most useful moral effect. When I was tempted I used to feel guilty of disloyalty and treason ; when I fell, it was with a sense of shame and horror. I used to think, 'If they only knew my true character ! ' And I used to strive—God alone knows how hard—to be worthy of those friendships. I feel pretty certain that scores of young fellows must have been helped in the same way. It's a simple thing, but simple things in life often count more than the big ones.

" Well, through the kindness of a man in the Association, I got a good appointment in a firm of chartered accountants, and was soon earning a decent salary. My foster-father was dead. For some time I had been living in lodgings. It occurred to me now that the best thing I could do for my soul and body would be to get married. At this time I experienced what seemed to me a definite conversion. I became exceedingly happy. For a quite considerable period I knew something of the joy, the elation, which saints tell about. It was like living in Paradise.

" During that happy spell in my life I got married. My salary enabled me to take a small house in Willesden. My wife was all I could wish. For a year or two I was free from spiritual persecution. A child came to us, and I experienced the full

happiness of parentage. It seemed as if my conversion had exorcised the demon.

"One day I discovered that the demon had only been sleeping. It woke in a strange form.

"I will tell you about it, if you really would care to hear the story. It's strange and puzzling, as well as rather horrible. I had been working late at the books of a big firm one day, and emerged, tired and fagged, into the streets a little before eight o'clock. A feeling came to me that it would be dull to go home. I seemed to have no energy to make for the railway station. I loitered in the streets, tired, irresolute. Then I thought I would go westwards, get something to eat, and look at the people till it was time for bed. It did not definitely occur to me at that moment, nor till an hour afterwards, that I was contemplating a sin, that my demon was awake, certainly not that my soul was in peril. Yet, I was dimly conscious of something that was off the line.

"When I had eaten my dinner I walked about the streets. I walked at a slow pace, almost a crawl. I found it pleasant and interesting to look at people. It was as if something of the world's pleasure and enjoyment came to me from the crowd, like the warmth of a fire. I was conscious of a sense of satisfaction, of interest, almost of gratitude.

"As I loitered in this way I noticed a girl standing alone at a street corner. She was a decent girl of the lower-middle classes, quietly dressed, and obviously respectable. No one in his senses would have taken her for a bad woman. Directly I saw her I wanted to speak to her. It was not a swift

and violent impulse; it was sluggish, sly, circumspect; but it was irresistible. I walked past her; looked in her face; went by; returned; looked at her again; and then stood at a few paces from her, watching. She saw me, and responded to my look with a smile. I felt myself tremendously tempted. I walked towards her, and as I went I knew that I was on the edge of sin, that my demon was awake.

"I made no resistance. I seemed to toss away all the restraints of my life, all my ideals, all my faith in God—everything. It was almost as if I went to my fall mocking. And yet, no sooner did I speak to the girl than I knew I should protect her from ruin."

He looks at me, and says very slowly: "What I am going to tell you is very difficult to put into words. I have studied myself so closely, however—just as if I were a doctor examining a patient—that I can give you at least a notion of my strange case.

"I have never committed, since my marriage, what the world would describe as a sin. The irresistible attraction which lonely women in the streets at night have for my mind is that of curiosity. There are times when I simply cannot pass without speaking to a girl who is standing alone in the streets. I feel I must speak to her. I feel I must talk with her. And sometimes I feel that I must tempt her to the edge of ruin. I want to know what she is doing, how she earns her living, where she lives, if she is religious, how she spends her leisure, and what things she thinks about in the privacy of her

mind. If I become very friendly with such a girl, and we meet often, and talk dangerously, and she becomes careless of everything, I always have the power to save her from ruin. I have told many such girls that I would rather die than do them harm.

"There's something, I can't tell you what, in these night encounters on the London streets which has for me just such a baleful fascination as the dipsomaniac finds in alcohol. It is as difficult for me sometimes to pass a solitary woman as it is at times for a dipsomaniac to pass a public-house. Many a time I go home, sit down with my wife and children, take up a book or a newspaper—and then the thought of women standing all alone in the dark street comes upon me with a spring, and I have to get up and go out. It's like a madness. It's something that I can't resist. It seems as if there are ghosts in all the dark streets of London beckoning and calling me. I see a woman in the shadows long before I get to her, and I seem to know instantly whether we shall speak and become friends. There seems to be some telepathic communication of ideas between solitary souls in London. A woman will often look up at me before I reach her. Many girls have said to me, 'I knew you were going to speak before you came up.'

"It isn't only that I seem to want the sympathy of these lonely women. That might be passed over and forgiven. There's something else. I am often visited by a really devilish desire to corrupt their minds and poison their purity. That is what depresses me. When I am out of these fits I see

how odious and abominable I have been. But at the time I am untroubled; I chuckle over it; just like a fiend.

"The fit seizes me in different ways. Sometimes I will go up to a girl, ask what she is doing, tell her that I am at a loose end, and suggest that we go to a cinematograph show or a music-hall. Very often I have done this, and parted from the girl outside with scarcely another word. I can't explain why. A cinematograph show or a music-hall would not attract me in the least if I were by myself, but sitting with a strange girl at my side, I enjoy such things as much as anybody else. And afterwards I just say good-bye to the girl, forget all about her, and go home contented—to feel in an hour all the anguish and contrition which follow a great sin.

"At other times I feel I must make a girl drink. The younger and the more innocent, the stronger is this feeling with me. Horrible and dreadful as I know this to be, I am struck by the curiosity of it. For I am to all intents and purposes a teetotaller. In my wholesome moods I recognise that alcohol is one of the most prolific sources of sin and crime. I have argued for teetotalism as hotly as any fanatic. It is part of the work I have undertaken in connection with my church. But when the mood is on me, I feel a savage pleasure in chaffing a girl to come into a public-house and drink with me. The more she hangs back, the more I persuade.

"Sometimes I am visited by a desire to find in one of these lonely women a true affinity, one with whom I can talk freely of everything in my soul, knowing that she will understand. Two or

three times this has happened to me. For weeks and even months I have lost all sense of the casual woman's attraction, and have been as constant as any lover to one particular woman. We have met as often as possible, gone for long solitary walks, met at luncheon in the middle of the day, gone into the country on Saturday afternoons, prayed together side by side in church on Sunday evenings. And with these women I have shared the whole of my double nature. At one moment I have been as low and vile as sin can drag me, at the next as sincere in religious aspiration as a saint. In one of these women I think I really did find my twin soul. No one would believe me if I told him about that girl's mind. She had nearly all the heights and nearly all the depths. At one moment she was saving my soul; at the next I was saving hers. We loved and struggled together till I thought it was impossible to endure the strain. I was, in fact, on the point of yielding to my lower nature and letting all my responsibilities go when I got one of those great checks which at various times in my life have been like a hand grabbing my shoulder and pulling me with violence away from utter ruin. In this case it was a sermon.

"I must tell you that my home life has not been happy. The discovery of my lower nature was soon made. It has been impossible for me to make amends. The fault is mine. No one can recognise that more clearly than I do. But now, when I am struggling hard, I could wish either that what is past had never been discovered or that it could be utterly forgiven and forgotten.

"However, that is an aspect of the case which I would rather not pursue. The interesting point is the recurrence in my life of the miracle of conversion. I have never felt myself absolutely abandoned by God. It is most curious to observe how I am pursued by the invisible powers of mercy. You would think I should be afraid of making you feel that I am a hypocrite. But if I make myself clear you will not fall into that error. There is really no element of hypocrisy. I long with a very deep and sincere longing for purity of heart. I go to religion, when I recognise my peril, with a perfectly sincere eagerness for rescue. And again and again in my life I have experienced such extraordinary changes of heart that I cannot prevent myself from acknowledging the miracle of conversion. Many men would say that I delude myself, that these occasions are not instances of conversion, because the effect is transient. I can see that they are certainly not the profound conversions which are experienced by other men; but just as certainly I know that they are not delusions. I have felt myself quite swept away towards God, and for weeks I have lived in the most complete assurance of His mercy and forgiveness. Indeed, at all times in my life, I have had the feeling that God alone knows my heart through and through, and that because He does know it—black and bad as it is—He continues His mercy. For with the evil propensity there has always been the reaction towards purity.

"My greatest human safeguard has been the Association. My wife has implored me to be more regular in my attendance, even to the point of

urging me to spend the whole of my spare time there, knowing that I get from the members a strengthening and energising of my moral faculties. Often has she said to me, 'You always come back from the Association a better and a nicer man.' But for the Association—through which I obtained material prosperity—I think I should have gone to spiritual shipwreck. And I will tell you why I say that. Directly a man who is trying to be good commits a sin, he is most powerfully tempted to abandon all effort and go with the tide. He has the feeling, first, that it is useless to contend against his own nature, and, second, that he will be a hypocrite if he associates himself with religious men. It is difficult for a sensitive mind to support the burden of this idea. It gives a man the feeling of a whipped dog. He seems to be slinking through life, not walking upright and squarely. I imagine that thousands of young men in London, once pure and religious, go to their everlasting ruin just through this feeling.

"It's a tremendous help to have such an institution as the Association, where a man guilty of sin can meet men, of his own age and circumstances, who are alive with moral energy and vigorous with spiritual fervour. He gets something from them. He is ashamed of himself, and feels reproached by their kindness and cheerfulness. They give him a new affection for straight living, an enthusiasm for the spiritual conflict. And what I feel particularly to be so helpful is this—a man who goes regularly to the Association and makes friendships and takes part in the general life of the brotherhood,

gets to know that spiritual warfare is the chief concern of the universe ; he loses, I mean, the depressing and ignominious sense that he is tainted, isolated, unique ; he feels that every man in the world is engaged in the universal fight, and that he, with his particular trouble, is only one among the millions of the human race.

"In church I have the feeling of isolation and guilt. Everyone else is Peter and John, Martha and Mary—I the solitary Judas. I don't say that is altogether bad. Often I have got a powerful impulse from a church service. But it's better in the Association. There's a feeling of reality and comradeship about those gatherings. I get no end of strength from them. They save me from despair. I think if it had not been for this help I should, long ago, have sunk to the bottom of London mud.

"It is very easy to give up the struggle. A man's own conscience seems to urge him in the direction of surrender. All the success in his daily life—and I have risen to be head clerk in my office —seems nothing, seems useless and contemptible. But the kind word and the true look of another man who believes in God and who makes him feel that the whole world is fighting for victory over sin will very often give a poor wretch just the necessary flick of courage which will make him struggle on, and hope. At least, I have found it so."

This man is now in a period of peace. Certain words said to him have restored his sense of Christ as a living, acting power for liberation. He has emerged from the black night of self-contempt

and pitiless self-examination. It may be that once again, or many times, he will relapse; but for the present at least he feels himself on surer ground than ever before. I do not think he will ever become abandoned to an evil and degraded life, though there is that in his nature which, without religion, might drag him into the worst of crimes and the most hideous of abominations. Only religion can hold such a man, and only religion lift him up when he breaks free and falls into sin.

He said to me at the end of our talk, "The tyranny of the habit was worse than the love of it. I never was happy; I felt myself always to be a victim. And now I have the feeling of deliverance, the sensation that a monster has been knocked from off my shoulders, as if I am at last truly my real self."

If this story only depresses you I fear that you are one of those who have never once stopped on your road, reined in your mule, and dismounted to bind up the wounds of a fallen fellow-creature. There are those who cannot bear to look upon a wound, for whom the sight of blood has a frightful horror, and who turn away from the fallen man, not that they grudge carrying him on their mules to the nearest inn and discharging the landlord's demands, but because their sense of refinement is too sharp and poignant for contact with gaping flesh and oozing blood. But there is something infinitely greater than refinement, something without which the fullness of the nobility of human nature can never be attained; and this thing is charity.

Many and great are the wounds of fallen humanity. The professional physician, in the form of psychologist and philosopher, stops to examine those wounds, delivers to the crowd an interesting lecture on the result of his examination, and, in the name of science, reproaches those who accuse him of a morbid interest in the unnatural and abnormal. But it is only the great Physician Himself Who stops on His way, bends over the fallen man, pours oil into the wound, lifts him up from the ground, and carries him away to a place of safety.

Those who are disciples of the great Physician must neither pass by on the other side nor stop merely in the interests of experimental psychology. They must bend down with love and pity, to comfort and to heal.

I do not think a man can ever understand the meaning of that phrase "The love of God"—"God so loved the world"—until he has a deep acquaintance with the horrors of sin and the depths of degradation to which the human mind can sink. We are apt to turn away with disgust from the frightful, drunken harridan, reeling blasphemous and filthy through the midnight streets, and to feel a profound aversion from the hard and scoffing man of sensual habits; but not only are these sad people included in the Universal Love of God, but those who have sunk to sins more dreadful, and those who have contracted the strangest and the worst diseases of the soul.

We find it hard even to think kindly of such people, we who are ourselves stained by I know not how many sins and visited by temptations

perhaps of a like nature; but Christ, the Son of God, the exquisite, innocent, and most holy Christ, not only thought kindly of such people, but went to them, embraced them, ministered to them, and sought to heal them.

It is not in the definitions of theologians that I come to a realisation of Christ's Divinity, but by a steadfast contemplation of His attitude towards sinful men. That amazing title "Friend of Sinners" has more of wonder and glory and divinity for me than all the clauses of the Athanasian Creed. The one vexes my intellect; the other touches my heart. The Son of God had hard and burning words for the orthodox religious of His day; He had nothing but love and tenderness, entreaty and tears, for those from whom we are too prone to turn with horror or contempt.

No man, I suppose, who has not learned to what depths the soul may sink, to what ruin and state of putrefaction that soul may come in the mire of the pit of infamy, can either feel the fullness of the wonder of Christ's love, or understand the meaning of those words, "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance."

CHAPTER VIII

THE OPENING OF A DOOR

"A LIFE," writes William James, "is manly, stoical, moral, or philosophical, we say, in proportion as it is less swayed by paltry personal considerations and more by objective ends that call for energy, even though that energy bring personal loss and pain. This is the good side of war, in so far as it calls for 'volunteers.' And for morality life is a war, and the service of the highest is a sort of cosmic patriotism which also calls for volunteers."

Such a volunteer is the man with whom this story is concerned. To him Mystery is a fact of life, but nothing of the mystic shows in the man's appearance. He is tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and muscularly upright. He makes one think of a soldier who has seen much service and won great honour. One feels, looking at the healthful face, which really burns with happiness, that for him it has never been difficult to obey the injunction of Joubert, "*Finally, we must love life while we have it: it is a duty.*" He is one of those vigorous men whose very voice is a rousing optimism. To have him fighting at one's side in a tight corner, or leading a forlorn hope, would inspire courage, I think, in the most cowardly. Nothing, one imagines,

could ever sink his joy or dash his fortitude with misgiving.

Such is the man's appearance, such is the impression made upon one's imagination by his outward form. But speak to him, and you find that he shrinks from even a military metaphor, that he will not allow you to call him a soldier of Christ, that his nature is modest, sensitive, humble and retiring almost to bashfulness. He told me that I might call him a labourer, a peasant of Christianity, but certainly not a soldier. The great strong vigorous man is as kind and gentle as a child.

There is a foolish habit among certain writers to speak of *the religious type*. From the most modern novelist, who would sacrifice everything for his conception of reality, down to the dreariest comedian of the music-hall stage who imitates the unctuous curate of a bygone age, there is a disposition to portray the religious man as a particular order of the human species, easily recognisable by certain distinct characteristics and swayed by a particular temperament which is common to the religious of all nations. This very ignorant and wholly unphilosophical attitude of mind misses the great wonder of religion. Nothing is more obvious, nothing is more striking, nothing is more interesting to the true and honest philosopher, than the universality of the religious spirit. Men of the most various temperament and the most diverse circumstances in life are impelled by the pressure of the soul, often along quite different roads, to the many kingdoms of immortality. From Pascal to Bunyan, from Milton to Kelvin, from Newman to

William Blake, from Bishop Gore to General Booth, from yourself to the man who lives next door to you, are there not to be found in the multitudinous army of God every order of individual and every type of human character? Consider the separation which divides John Lawrence, of India, from Brother Lawrence of *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Think of the infinity of variation which lies between Livingstone and Goethe. Reflect upon the stellar space which stretches from the soul of Tolstoy to the soul of Manning. And what likeness can be found in the life of Kingsley to the life of Swedenborg? To look carefully upon the Church of Christ is to look upon the world. "I will draw," said the Saviour, "all men unto Me."

In this story the reader finds himself glancing at the life of a successful business man who is conscious of the mystery of the universe, who has felt himself definitely swayed by invisible agencies, and who is a gay, bright-hearted, and most valiant labourer for God. Strangely different is he from the type of religious person in contemporary novels, and yet he is but one of a vast host whom you pass every day in the streets of a city, the ordinary man in the ordinary world of commonplace, to whom the extraordinary thing has happened and for whom evermore life is ennobled by a "cosmic patriotism."

He is a Welshman; a man some fifty years of age; fine-looking, as I have suggested, with the spirit of the soldier both in face and figure. His eyes are extraordinarily bright, with sheer happiness; the skin has the glow of perfect health; his deep voice is melodious and good-humoured. He seems

to rejoice in everything. He speaks with the same ringing enthusiasm of physical exercise, sleeping in the open air, and temperate eating as characterises his references to the joy and glory of the religious life—the active religious life. He is above everything else a man of action—one who recognises that a true Christian must make himself an instrument in the Hand of God, and for the glory of God work hard and ever for the Kingdom of righteousness.

There is no point in his life at which he recognises the mystery of a single yielding of his spirit—a definite hour of the soul with God. He does not speak of his conversion as a single moment of sudden apprehension. Illumination was in his soul from early childhood, a dim light at the beginning, but one which has increased in brightness with the development of his other faculties. He has been without the sense of God, he has suffered and questioned, but he has never fallen into desperate sin nor surrendered himself to the indifference of agnosticism.

"I owe everything," he says, with a charming tenderness, "to my mother. Ah, her death!—it froze everything. She taught herself geography by writing to her sons. From the days when we lay in her lap to the days when we were middle-aged men scattered all over the world, she poured out a great tide of love upon us all, a love which was as wise and intelligent as it was deep and gentle. I believe her letters to her sons, in their manhood, helped to preserve their purity and sense of honour."

He saw something of poverty and distress in the town where his childhood was spent, and came gradually and as it were unconsciously to know the horror of life, the cruelty of circumstance, the bitterness of sin and suffering.

"There was in our town a small branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, and as soon as we were old enough to join it some of us became members. It was there that I first got a chance of doing something for others."

At this time he was old enough to see what sin did in the lives of men. He could not take a walk through the streets or listen to the gossip at the supper-table without learning that sin is the enemy of happiness, the great discordant element in human life. At first he could not understand how men—intelligent and sensible men—could drink themselves into wretchedness and ill-health. That a man should ever come to spend his money on drink, while his children went in rags and actually lacked food, staggered his mind. He saw that bad men are lower than the meanest of animals. He saw to what depths of unnatural infamy the soul may come when it denies the laws of God.

"I was impressed and perhaps influenced by the Sunday afternoon services which the Association used to hold, during the summer months, on the side of the mountains overlooking the town.

"It was very beautiful and calm. The whole earth seemed to lie at our feet. Above our heads was the blue of heaven, like the blessing of God. And looking down from the rock of the mountain, over the grassy sides which were bright with little

flowers and soft with the foliage of trees which shone in the sunlight, I used to gaze into the city under the haze which floated over the roofs, and, while we were singing hymns or listening to the words of Christ, think of all the sin and misery, all the unhappiness and ugliness, which was hidden in its crowded streets."

One is reminded of Carlyle. "Oh, under that hideous coverlet of vapours, and putrefactions, and unimaginable gases, what a fermenting-vat lies simmering and hid! The joyful and the sorrowful are there; men are dying there, men are being born; men are praying—on the other side of a brick partition men are cursing; and around them all is the vast, void Night. . . . All these heaped and huddled together, with nothing but a little carpentry and masonry between them;—crammed in, like salted fish in their barrel;—or weltering, shall I say, like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed vipers, each struggling to get its *head above* the others: *such* work goes on under that smoke counterpane!"

The young Welshman on the mountain-side realised that there was another remedy for all this misery than a flow of splendid, stimulating rhetoric. He believed that each man suffering and unhappy in that "Egyptian pitcher of tamed vipers," before he could become glad of life and profoundly happy in his spirit, must surrender his heart to God, must accept Christ for his Saviour, and live henceforth with the music of eternity in his soul. He thought of political remedies. He concerned himself occasionally with sociological theories and the theses of philosophy. But

more often, perhaps, he realised that then and there—with all the existing laws and in all the existing circumstances, without change of any kind in the physical conditions of that daily life—*all* the misery and wretchedness, *all* the unhappiness and conflict, *all* the desperation, ruin, and thousandfold vexations of heart and brain, would cease instantly, be as if they had never been, did the town but kneel before their Father in heaven and acknowledge the Love of Christ.

And it was not only that he saw through religion this change in the lot of the wicked and unhappy, but he saw through religion, true religion, a change in the lives of the moral and prosperous. He visualised those prosperous people active in the service of Christ, ministering to the sick and sad, helping the poor, strengthening the weak, teaching the young, and comforting the old; so that the town became not a city divided against itself, but a united family of the human race, of whom God was the acknowledged Father.

"It was there," he told me, "that I began to long for more active work, that I heard the call of my Master to serve with His labourers. And the call was not to any work in the ministry, but to work as a layman among laymen—which is the spirit of the Young Men's Christian Association. I determined to fight against sin, to be ever on the side of Christ, and at the same time to earn my bread by honest work while I marched in the ranks of the human army, a simple private."

From this point he comes to an extraordinary thing in his life. He has never told it to the world,

only a few of his friends know about it, and he told it to me before he quite realised what he had done—carried away by his honesty as he sought to go back thirty years in his life and trace the influences which had shaped it.

"I obtained," he told me, "an important appointment, the nature of which I do not wish to disclose. But it was an appointment which provided me with something more than money and something more than authority—it provided me with the enthusiasm of ambition.

"For a long time I thought myself the most fortunate man in the town. My mother was delighted. My brothers were proud of me. All my friends said that I was an exceedingly lucky fellow. Such was the state of things with me, when a change in the organisation of this service introduced and made necessary a certain duty which violated my conscience. If I stayed in my appointment, I had to do something which my conscience told me was wrong. And if I refused to do this thing, there was nothing for it but dismissal.

"I was conscious of a great depression. I went about the world in a very wretched condition, feeling that my career was now broken, that I must inevitably resign, and not knowing in the least what would become of me.

"I made it a matter of prayer. I read the Bible for guidance. . . .

"The weight of depression gradually lightened, leaving me uncertain, teased, perplexed. I was unhappy in a tolerable way.

"During this time I was following my official

career and spending my Sunday afternoons with the class in a local Sunday-school to which I had devoted myself for some time.

"One Sunday afternoon I was teaching my class when, at the sudden opening of the door, I experienced a strange, indescribable feeling. I cannot make you understand the sensation, which seemed suddenly to run all through my body, except by saying that I knew, just as if I had been told, that something was going to happen. In a moment my listlessness, my vexation, my sense of a divided and uncertain consciousness, vanished clean out of my mind. I was startled by a vivid apprehension of expectation. Something was going to happen. Then. Immediately. To me.

"That was the feeling as well as I can describe what is really indescribable. The door had opened, a stranger had entered, and before he spoke a word I felt that something was going to happen to me.

"And now I must tell you something more strange and more difficult to explain. As the door opened an intuition came to me which seemed to say, '*Speak to this man.*'

"The man who had entered the schoolroom was, as I have said, a complete stranger. I surmised from his appearance that he was an Englishman. Something apart from my intuition attracted me to this man. I went towards him and spoke to him.

"He told me that he was an Englishman, and explained that he was interested in children and methods of education. I offered to show him the Sunday-school. All the time I was explaining

things to him I had the feeling that this man had come to me by the mercy of God. I did not know in what way he would affect my life, but I was sure, strangely, very strangely and absolutely sure, that he would change the conditions which were then afflicting me. Shall I put it in the simplest way? I knew this man had come to me in answer to my prayer.

"After he had listened to my lesson to the children I inquired if he had yet seen the town, placing myself entirely at his disposal if he should care to go sight-seeing.

"We left the school, and went out into the streets.

"We had not done very much sight-seeing when I opened my heart and told him the whole story of my difficulty. Now, this may seem a simple thing to say, but in reality it was as strange as the first sensation of expectancy which had come to me at the opening of the door. And I will tell you why. In the first place, remember, this man was a perfect stranger to me. In the second, he was not Welsh, and could hardly be expected to understand the local difficulties of the situation. And in the third, the whole matter was of so private and delicate a character that even now, many years afterwards, I cannot declare it without causing unpleasantness and doing harm.

"Yet I opened my heart and explained everything to that stranger! I felt that this confidence, so difficult for me to give, so difficult for him to understand, was all of a piece with the mystery which seemed at that time to take my life out of

my own keeping. I felt then, and I feel now, that the invisible forces of God were active with my soul. Nothing else of a like kind has ever happened to me. I have never experienced any of those mysterious things which happen to men in moments of elation or at times of great abasement. My life before that day was singularly normal, and ever since it has been the hard and healthy life of an ordinary business man. But on that day, as sure as I am living now, something happened to me that was not normal, not ordinary, and not a delusion.

"Well, the Englishman heard me out, and then turned to me with a smile and said, 'You are perfectly right; it would be a sin for you to go against your conscience. I tell you what you must do. You must resign at once, and come with me to London.'

"Of course I had never dreamed of such a thing! To leave Wales, the country that I loved, seemed at the moment a hard, almost an impossible thing. And yet, even with the shudder that came to me at the thought of leaving home, I had the feeling that God was leading me to England.

"And this feeling deepened, when I talked to the Englishman, as we walked through the streets of the town. I discovered that he was a most earnest Christian. He took me back to his hotel, and I sat with him for a long time, talking of religion and the problem of my own life, which was interwoven with religion.

"I cannot tell you what occurred to me on my arrival in London. You must be content with

things as they are at this present time. Ever since I came things have prospered with me in a most amazing way. But, of course, I recognised from the outset that God did not bring me to England only to prosper me and give me easy circumstances. And I can tell you how I came to see what work was ready for my hand, work in His Name and to His Glory.

"One of the first things I did on coming to London was to join the Central Young Men's Christian Association. I was very happy there. I made true friends and learned the outlook of the English mind on religion and social problems. I threw myself into the missionary work, thinking that it was for this God had brought me to England. Services and Bible classes were held at that time with something of the enthusiasm of a religious revival. I gave up every hour of my spare time to this work, helping to save people at the same time that I myself was learning.

"How it quite happened I cannot distinctly remember, but I think this was the beginning. One night a man was standing on the steps of our old hall in the Strand, inviting people to come in and join our meeting, when he saw two Frenchmen going past, laughing and festive, certainly in no mood for a religious meeting. They seemed to stand out from all the other people crowding by. Something moved him towards them. He went down the steps, took the arm of the man nearest to me, and in his own language invited him to come in and join our meeting. They were both surprised. After a moment they became self-conscious and awkward. They tried

to laugh it off. Gently he persisted with his invitation. Finally they yielded.

"Now, one of those men was converted at the end of the meeting. He is at this time of day—more than twenty years afterwards—a most ardent supporter of the Association. And he told me that at the moment of that invitation he was walking with his friend in the Strand looking out for an opportunity for vice—the usual thing for which the Strand was even more infamous then than it is at the present time.

"He had only just arrived in England. On landing it had seemed that a new life was begun for him. In London he was instantly aware of the contagion of vice and felt the attraction of sin. But, at the meeting, something that was said about home-life touched his heart with remembrance of his mother. A thousand beautiful memories came crowding back to his soul. The tears, he told me, rushed to his eyes. He thought of the evil deed he had just contemplated, and shrank in horror from the man he had so suddenly become in a few hours from leaving home. When the invitation came at the end of the meeting for those who felt the need of a Saviour to stand up and declare themselves soldiers of Christ, this Frenchman stood up and gave himself for life and for eternity to the service of God."

Incidents of this nature influenced the young Welshman to take up definite work in the foreign section of the Young Men's Christian Association, a branch of its work little known to the general public.

He saw the peril of young foreigners in the London

streets. They come, many of them, from good homes, and straightway are thrown to the mercies of the world in the great glaring streets of London. Before they can get their feet, before they can get established on a virtuous foundation, they are seduced by the apparent friendliness and kindness of vice. They are alone, solitary, afraid. No one is there to take their hand, to help them, to show them kindness. The great, terrible city appals and overwhelms them. And then they see what looks like kindness, what looks like friendship, what certainly appears to be bright, gay, cheerful, merry, and good-hearted. Is it wonderful that some of these lonely men in London forget the home left behind in France, in Switzerland, in Italy, in Germany ?

The man in this story felt a compassion for these young foreigners in London, and devoted his spare time to working for them. He recognised in this particular work a call from God. He assisted in the building up of the foreign section of the oung Men's Christian Association, and to-day he is still one of the men who give up their leisure to this branch of the Association's activity. He does not boast of what he has done ; he rather seeks to minimise his part of the work, and to ascribe to others the measure of success which it has obtained, but one learns from those who know the truth of the matter how lavishly he has given both time and money to the work. There must be many men scattered all over the world who owe their salvation, humanly speaking, to the devotion of this honest labourer for God.

In the new building of the Central Association in Tottenham Court Road, provision is made on a generous scale for the work of the foreign section. It is greatly to be hoped that no effort will be spared to make this work thoroughly successful. For it requires no imagination to see how great may be the benefit to humanity, to all nations and all countries, from a religious brotherhood which includes men of all languages and unites representatives of all peoples in the common faith of an active Christianity. There are branches of the Association throughout the world, but a central brotherhood of international character in London—where the peoples of so many countries come into daily collision—must have a useful influence among all the nations.

I can assure the reader, who may possibly be dull and bored by his existence, that he would find most interesting employment for his time in this branch of the Association's work. Here, as elsewhere, the scope is boundless.

CHAPTER IX

MASTER AND MAN

THE man tells the story, and it is his own story ; but as he tells it one feels that the master is there also, standing behind him, watching, listening, and guilty, like a prisoner in the dock.

Let me say at the outset that since hearing the man's story I have made independent inquiries and found that certainly the central facts of what he told me are perfectly true. Let me also say that I know in my own experience at least three cases similar to that of the master in this story.

He was born in London, the son of a small tradesman in the City, and grew up to boyhood in the shadow of tall warehouses that closed about him like prison walls. He was quick and independent, something of a humorist, and perfectly contented with his Cockney fate.

Gradually he perceived that things were going wrong between his father and mother. At the time he did not realise the grounds of this divergence, but learned afterwards that the father was unfaithful. He saw that his mother was miserable, depressed, and that she frequently gave way to weeping. He noticed that his father's manner was increasingly

hard and unkind. This was the child's earliest contact with perplexity and confusion.

The lease of the shop fell in ; the father came to loggerheads with his landlord ; there was a sudden explosion in the domestic life, and that little home in the centre of London's trade ceased to exist.

The mother took her children to a village in Surrey ; the father disappeared out of their life. He had given himself to sin, and sin carried him far away from the family circle.

At an early age it became necessary for the boy to earn his living. Influence procured him a place in one of the warehouses whose walls had overshadowed his childhood. He went to London and became a wage-earner.

Up to this period his training had been that of an ordinary boy in humble circumstances—the board school, perfunctory religious observances in the home, and the Sunday-school. He was moral, but he had no religious feeling.

The immensity of the warehouse stunned and overwhelmed him at first. He was homesick, and miserable, and rather frightened. Two or three days after his arrival, however, he received a letter. It was addressed to him from a local branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, and invited him to tea. He was flattered by the invitation, was conscious, he told me, of a sense of importance, and felt relieved to find that he had friends in London. The horror of the living-in system, which at that time was still bad, had begun to affect his nerves.

As he entered the premises of the Association he

was greeted by name, and was at once introduced to other young men of his own age. A feeling of comfort and pleasantness destroyed his nervousness. He felt happy and at ease.

He became a member, and spent most of his leisure hours in the building. He formed friendships, attended lectures, played games, read the papers, and was present at some of the prayer meetings. Religion did not at once exert an influence on his character, but it was there in the atmosphere of that social life, colouring the man's mind unconsciously, if not consciously shaping his character.

And the next stage in his development brought it nearer to his soul.

He became aware of human nature's strongest passion.

Ordinarily he is the most quiet of men, a veritable Cockney, drawling his words, smiling at his enthusiasms, and for ever seasoning his serious speech with a quaint phrase, a telling piece of slang, or an amusing story. But when he spoke of those temptations in his early manhood, he became almost fervent in his efforts to describe the furnace through which he passed.

"I think I may fairly say," he began slowly, "though it's a hard thing to say of one's own father, but I think I may say I received from him an unnaturally violent impetus to sin. In any case, some men are more tempted in that way than others. I've known a few men as badly tempted as myself, others only slightly tempted, and some surprised that a man should feel any temptation at all in that direction. But in my case it was something so

frightful that I simply cannot describe it to you. Why!" he exclaimed, with sudden passion, "the streets were like a burning fiery furnace to me! The sight of it all! The openness, the ease, the glamour. . . . Well, all I can hope is that no other young man may ever suffer as I did in those days. I thought I should go mad!"

The sense of danger became so overwhelming that he looked to right and left of him for a way of escape. He had tried everything he knew to counteract the tendency in his blood, but it was in vain. After all his laborious inventions to free himself, he felt the driving force of this terrific temptation pressing him out of purity and into shame. He was on the very verge of the great fall.

One day it occurred to him that religion was the cure for his ill. He began to read the Bible, began to pray, began to talk about religion with one or two men in the warehouse who went to church. The temptation remained.

He was almost in despair, felt himself on the point of yielding, when an address delivered at the Association's premises dragged him clear of the danger. It was not an address about fighting against temptations, nothing in the nature of a local suggestion, but was the whole and total life of Christianity, the life itself.

"I shall never forget as long as I live," he told me, "the awakening, the revelation, the sensation of seeing everything clear at last, which seemed to light up my whole soul for me. It was as if a fog had rolled away, all of a sudden. I saw everything

about me, not only clear, but shining. And this was what the man said—only in better language than I can tell you, although, mind you, it was quite simple and plain, no fireworks, nothing of that kind, just common-sense words. He said that Christianity was a life of service ; that a man might read the Bible and pray and attend church and meetings, and yet not be a Christian at all. Unless, said he, a man is working for others, helping others to be good, doing all that he possibly can to stop evil and propagate good, he is not a true Christian. It struck me like a whip. I seemed to jump up. 'What!' I said to myself; 'here have I been calling myself a Christian all these months, and really and truly I'm not a Christian at all! And, of course, I'm not. I'm selfish. I've been thinking about my own soul, about my own temptations. Why! I've never lifted a single finger in my life to help man, woman, or child.' I saw it as clear as light. All my difficulty had come from brooding on myself. And to get clear I had to be a Christian. *And to be a Christian I had to be converted.* It seemed to me then that conversion was something more than a word; that it was a tremendous change of a man's whole life. I could see what it meant. It meant a right-about-face ; yes, and a turning inside out of everything that had before seemed natural and obvious and common-sense. I looked at the thing, saw it quite clearly, and knew how to get it. But for a moment or two I hung back, as if I was afraid to trust myself to it. It was so big, and I was so small. The world was so enormous, and this thing was clean contrary to the

world. However, I made up my mind to surrender. That is the true word. It's a surrender of doubts, and difficulties, and fears, and nervousness, and misgivings. It's a surrender of argument and seeking and looking about. It's a surrender of self. I stood up in the meeting and declared for God. Something happened to me. I can't describe it. Something happened—as if a storm had stopped.

"I went back that night determined that no single day should ever go over my head without some act of service towards my fellow-man, done for the sake and in the Name of my Saviour. I started to pray night and morning in the dormitory. I arranged a Bible-reading class once a week. I went among the packers and carters and got them to join our circle. Of course I had to stand a lot of chaff. I was frightfully chipped! But I'm a bit of a funny chap myself, and I could see how it must strike others at first, and I took it all in good part. There was a looking-glass in the room where we had our dinner, and I used to paste up a great big notice on it, once a week, giving the subject of the next address, generally a text. The other men used to laugh at it and make jokes about it, but I generally got the better of them on that score. Of course there's a danger in exhibiting texts—by the by, I must tell you a story about that—but I'm perfectly certain it makes many a man think about religion. I'm sure those texts on the looking-glass in our dining-room *began* the work of conversion in the hearts of many men.

"This is the story. I was once sending out placards announcing a religious address at Exeter

Hall. The text was a very solemn one. I wanted sandwich-board men to parade Regent Street and Oxford Street with these notices, but was anxious about getting the right kind of men for such a job. So I went to the local agency of the Salvation Army, said I wanted to hire so many sandwich-men, and then added, 'But I don't want drunken-looking fellows to parade the streets with that text on their backs, nor to see the boards left outside a public-house; you must give me decent men.' 'Well,' said the officer, considering, 'I could give you ordinary men at two shillings, but I couldn't guarantee a soundly converted man under three and sixpence.' Isn't that good? I couldn't help laughing! The price of a converted man—three-and-six!"

I asked him if his temptations vanished at the moment of conversion.

"They left me for a time," he said, "but they came back—only without anything like the same strength; it was quite easy for me to subdue them. There was no fever in the brain, no feeling that I should go mad. Nothing of that. I was never tortured again, not once."

He had been three years in the warehouse when an opportunity came to improve his fortunes. He was offered the position of clerk in a merchant's office, a quite different business from that in which he had been engaged, but, as he told me with a proud smile, "There isn't much a man can't do who has been three years in a City of London warehouse." The pay, of course, was better, the hours were a trifle lighter, and there was no living-in. All these things were desirable, but what

most commended the change to him was the character of this new master. He was "a godly man."

This gentleman was married, and lived with his wife in Wimbledon. The business was a comfortable one. It not only provided a good profit, but allowed the master plenty of leisure for less material pursuits. He took the chair at religious meetings, gave addresses, made prayers, and served on committees of religious societies. He came from the North of England, and had that grip and practical hard-headed common sense which makes men of affairs so extremely useful in the machinery of religion. Moreover, he was a comparatively rich man, and subscribed liberally to the funds of religious activity.

Nothing could have been more promising for our young man. He went to this new life with a feeling that Heaven had rewarded him far beyond his hopes. Everything had come to his hand. He was a free man, able to live where he wished, employed by a rich master who would not only admire his enthusiasms but share them, and in his ampler spare time he would have the work of the Young Men's Christian Association, the friendships and social intercourse of that society, to keep him happy and active.

But it was not quite what he expected, after all. The master was hard, sometimes exacting, and very often lacking in even an elementary sympathy. Further, his religious activity took him out of office so frequently, and for such long spells, that the clerk often had to work late in the evening

to make up for time thus lost in the day. He could have supported this hardship but for the master's roughness, which was sometimes cruel and unbearable.

In appearance the master was something of a giant, a man with a shock of stubborn hair, a bristling beard, eyes that flashed with energy and vehemence, a massive forehead that was like a wall. He was an able merchant, a powerful character, a masterful soul. There was something fine and strong in his rugged appearance which suggested the strength and force of a rigorous spirit.

"You will hardly believe what I am going to tell you," said the man, "but it is true, and worse, infinitely worse, is to follow. For six years I never had more than a week's holiday. He worked me like a slave, and he treated me like a dog. Not at first, but even from the first he was coarse and brutal, as unlike a Christian as anything you can imagine. It came gradually, not until I was master of his secret, had the business, practically speaking, entirely in my own hands, and was tied to him, as well he knew, by loyalty and my sense of Christian duty. Then he let himself go, and fairly trampled on me. Outside he was everything noble, good, and unselfish ; in the office he was like a devil.

"And now I must tell you his secret. He would very often be absent for days, weeks, and at last even for months. Sometimes he would tell me he was going away ; but often it was only by telegram a day or two later that I learned he would not be back for some time. I had no suspicion at first, and none of the junior clerks knew anything about the

matter. It was not until I noticed certain unaccountable items in his bank-account—for I had now full control of everything—that I began to have an inkling of the truth. Many of these strange cheques were for large sums, and some of them were made payable to second-rate hotels in London.

"One day it came out. He sent for me by telegram to one of these hotels. Certain contracts had to be signed, and I had written to his private address, pointing out the extreme importance of not missing the date. The answer to my letter was the telegram, which told me to bring the papers to the hotel.

"I shall not easily forget what I saw. He was drunk!—as drunk as a practised drunkard ever can be drunk. There he sat, this godly man, alone in a little dark room, his face the colour of violet, his eyes frowning and half shut, his hair ruffled, his clothes dirty—the living picture of a sot! So amazed was I, so horrified, that I could neither plead nor reproach. I put the papers before him, got pen and ink, showed him where he was to sign, and went away as quickly as I could.

"That was the biggest shock I ever had in my life. As I walked away, away through the crowded streets of London, I was like a man who has been stunned. I couldn't see anything clearly. The noise of the traffic and the sound of voices were muffled and dull. Everything seemed unreal. And I was thinking, as I walked along, that perhaps religion was unreal too!

"I was a young man, and perhaps rather emotional. But think of it! This employer of mine was a *leader* of religion. He was one of the great

fighters for righteousness, one of the captains in Christ's army. Yes, and he made sacrifices for religion. He gave his time, his talents, and his money. He was no hypocrite using religion for business purposes. Religion did not affect his business at all. No; he was perfectly genuine, and the work he gave to religion entailed a very considerable sacrifice. I knew that well, and I saw it quite clearly. But, all the same, I had seen this godly man in a little dark room of a little shabby hotel in a back street, drunk and horrible! I tell you that was a frightful shock.

"It seemed to me, thinking it over, that religion was not the power I had imagined it to be. I almost came to think that I had deceived myself in my own conversion. I thought to myself that if religion had no power to prevent my master from sinking to such depths it could not be so great and saving a power as I had imagined. For you must see that this man's religion was not merely one of profession, but one of active work and sincere service. It was a life. And yet I had seen what I had seen!

"For a long time I was dreadfully miserable. My faith was not extinguished, but it was eclipsed. What would have become of me but for the Association, I do not like to think. It was the pure atmosphere of that place, the affectionate friendships, the interest and encouragement of the work, which carried me through those dark days and at last brought me to the light. I cannot overestimate the value of the Association to my spiritual life at that period. It helped me. It encouraged me. It gave me hope. At last I saw the truth. I saw

that while service is the soul of the religious life, the foundation is faith. I saw what I had never sharply seen before, and never properly understood, that a man may give his life to God's service and yet be far from the Kingdom of God."

Our London clerk, one sees, had arrived at that point where the mystery of faith seizes upon the soul and illumines the whole field of appearance with spiritual light, at that point where Maeterlinck stood when he said :

> " We may possibly be neither good, nor noble, nor beautiful, even in the midst of the greatest sacrifice ; and the sister of charity who dies by the bedside of a typhoid patient may perchance have a mean, rancorous, miserable soul."

In other, older, diviner, and more eternal words, " *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name, and in Thy Name have cast out devils, and in Thy Name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.*"

Philanthropy pales before those words.

But for the life he lived in the work of the Association, our clerk would never have come to realise the essential consecration of faith. He might have kept to the narrow path, he might have overcome the temptation to think that religion was a psychological illusion, but he could hardly have come to deepen and transform his whole spiritual life by and through the very cause which threatened at first to overwhelm him.

He told me that as soon as he saw the fundamental essentiality of faith he set himself to live in that

dependence on spiritual power, that utter trust in the Person of Christ which is the only tranquillity of soul a man may know on earth.

And all that he went through never once weakened his spiritual life or disturbed its serenity.

The master would sometimes send for him in the midst of a drinking bout, and the clerk would plead with him and get him to go home. On many occasions the man himself took the master home and supported him into the house.

"It was terrible, those home-comings," he told me. "There would be the wife, standing in the hall, white as a ghost, horribly ashamed, and yet so proud that she regarded me with hatred for being the spectator of her tragedy. The master would cling to me, insist that I should go with him into the drawing-room, and make me play to him. There we would sit—he collapsed in an arm-chair, I at the piano, and the tall, white-haired wife, silent and upright, on a straight-backed chair between us. 'Play something!' he would command; 'you know how to fiddle about with those notes; play something.' 'What shall I play?' I asked him on the first occasion. What do you think he said? He said to me, 'Play *Just as I am, without one plea.*' And I played him that hymn. Over and over again when I took him home he made me play him such hymns as that.

"He would come back to the office after one of these debauches, and, sitting in his chair, I standing before him, he would measure me with his eyes contemplatively, and say, 'None of you fellows in the Young Men's Christian Association know how to

deal with a penitent sinner—not one of you. You don't understand anything about it.' And sometimes he would say to me—for by this time we used to talk quite freely on the subject—'Do you know why I fall? It is because the whole engine of Satan's power is directed against me. And do you know why the whole engine of Satan's power is directed against me? It is because he knows I am in the forefront of the battle for Christ. Satan knows, you may depend on it, who to go for. No man could stand against such power.' And when he said this, I believe he was sincere. I believe his soul was in such a frightful state that he could make himself believe any single thing that flattered his spiritual pride or saved it from destruction.

"But wouldn't you have thought that my knowledge of his secret sin, to say nothing of the way in which I helped him and controlled his whole business, would have led him to show me exceptional indulgence? On the contrary, his tyranny became worse with every day of our intimacy. Really, his is the most extraordinary character I have ever known. The worse his bout, the more censorious his treatment of me. He used to come back to the office in a flaming state of bitterness, and speak to me as if *I* had been the cause of his debauch. Let me give you a couple of instances of what I mean.

"My mother was living with me in lodgings in the suburbs. She had been very ill, and now it was apparent that she must die. I was tenderly attached to her, and I could not bear to think of her dying alone in those dreary lodgings. Moreover, her

disease was terrible. She was dying in the greatest pain.

"Well, I used to take every opportunity I could to run down and see her during the day, if only for a few minutes. I spent my dinner-time in this way, and as the end came nearer I would sometimes go and see her in the afternoon. Occasionally I arrived late at the office, occasionally—if it were possible—I went away before my usual time. I confess I was irregular in my attendance. Remember, I had only had six weeks' holidays for six whole years. At last the end came. My mother was dead. I went to my master, told him, and asked for a day's leave, for the funeral. Now, what do you think that man said to me? He looked me full and accusing in the face, as if I had committed a crime, and said, 'May I ask if this is to be the last of these irregularities?' Hitherto I had always restrained myself, I had always tried to be a true Christian, but *then* my blood boiled with indignation. However, I got a grip of myself, and only said to him, 'I believe, sir, that after death there is nothing left except the burying.' And it was long before I could really forgive him.

"The other instance is not quite so bad. Thirteen or fourteen months after my mother's death, I was making arrangements to get married. I asked for a week's holiday for the honeymoon. 'Is it really necessary for you to get married?' he demanded. Think of that! Then he went on to say that it was most inconvenient for him to let me go at that time, that certainly a week was quite out of the question, and that if the marriage really must

take place, could I not manage to do with just the single day? I was so bitter that I said to him, 'So far as that goes, sir, a whole day is not necessary; I believe the religious ceremony only takes an hour. Perhaps you would kindly grant me an hour, and I would come back immediately afterwards.' And that was what actually happened. I went from the office to the church, got married, and was at my desk again in an hour's time.

"Some months afterwards—things going from bad to worse in the office—my master sent for me one day and had a long talk about the state of the business. I knew how critical things were, and spoke my mind with unusual frankness. I told him plainly that no business could stand against these continual absences of the head. I also mentioned the matter of cheques drawn on the business for £30 in one week—cheques for drink and lodging. He said to me, 'You don't understand these matters. I am marked down by Satan. The power of evil swoops down upon me, and carries me away before I know where I am. I can't stand against it, because I never know when it is coming. It springs upon me, and I know nothing more till the fit has passed.' This may have been true in the past, true when I first came to the business; but it was true no longer. For I myself could now tell when these fits would seize him. He used to make all his plans for them—a day or two beforehand. Yes, on days when he was quite rational, when he was taking the chair at religious meetings or conducting prayer meetings, he would come to the office, inquire as to contracts for the next two or three

weeks, draw sufficient cheques for the wages over that period, give me the same instructions a man would leave behind him on starting for a holiday, and then disappear into the back streets of London, and remain drunk for twenty days.

"I grew more and more anxious about this state of things. My master had begun to speculate. One or two of these speculations were of the wildest possible character. You can imagine my anxiety, for I was soon to become a father, and the future looked black indeed. One day my master consulted with me. 'I want you,' he said, 'to take a week's holiday; you deserve it; you've worked hard; you had better go to the sea and get fit; after that we must see what can be done about the business.' Then he said to me, 'We want capital; I suppose you haven't got three or four hundred pounds?—you couldn't put your hands on such a sum, could you?' I almost laughed at the idea. I told him I had not even got enough money to go away with to the coast, but should spend my holiday at home. He nodded, looked relieved, which surprised me, and took a casual farewell of me. This was on Thursday.

"On Saturday I received a letter from him, dismissing me! He told me to send back the duplicate keys I possessed of the office and the safe, and expressed the hope that I should not be long in finding a fresh situation. In other words, he simply flung me out on the street. I had a week-end, I can tell you! There was I, soon to become a father, with only a few shillings in the family stocking, flung out on the streets to starve, yes, and by a man

I had served faithfully for eight years! I told my wife, and she took it splendidly, sure that we should be helped. We did what all people do when they are made to realise their utter helplessness. We simply poured out our souls to God. On the Sunday afternoon I took my class as usual, and got through it somehow or another, but not, I am afraid, with much energy of will. The fear of the future weighed me down. My face must have shown the mental strain. One of my associates came to me after the school was over, and asked if I was in trouble. I told him the whole story. He was a poor man, just one of those simple and humble Christians who work hard all the week and give their Sundays in obscure service to God. But what do you think he said to me? He said: 'Trust yourself entirely to God; He will never desert you; this trial of your faith will prove ultimately a blessing; and in the meantime I can let you have twenty pounds for present needs.' At first I was only touched, touched to the heart, by this splendid sympathy. Then I saw how real and noble a thing religion is, for this man was poor and had a struggle to live. Finally I saw that it was an answer to prayer.

"Everything from that moment prospered with me. It is too long a story to tell, but you may like to know that I started in business for myself, that another man employed by my former master joined me later on, and that we are now busy from morning till night. One thing I must tell you, the last thing concerning my old master. When he asked if I had three or four hundred pounds, or could put my hands on such a sum, he was only trying to find out if I

could start in business for myself. He knew he was going to dismiss me. He knew that such a sum could not have saved him from ruin. The look of relief in his face, which had surprised me at the time, meant that he was not afraid of losing his customers in turning me out at a moment's notice. He thought I should sink.

"I often think about him. He has no power now to darken my faith, and I think I may say with perfect honesty that I bear him no ill-will. I hope, too, that I never judge him. But I am interested in him as a man, and curious about him as a Christian. You see, it wouldn't be true to say he is a hypocrite. He has nothing whatever to get out of religion. He might be an atheist without injuring his business. But there he is, a saint in church and a drunkard in secret. In public life he is a liberal and virtuous man, in private a tyrant. What can you make of such a man? It is one of the most baffling cases I ever came across.

"There is something I should like to say to you about the Association. In my early days, alone in London, and at a time when I was frightfully tempted to go wrong, it provided me with the right companionships, and led me to a life of service, which is the only safe way and the only true way for a young man to go. And mixing with religious men of various creeds and various ages teaches one tact. I remember once going into a Lockhart's coffee-shop in the Seven Dials, where I used to do mission work. An old man was seated there, ragged, wretched, and depressed. In front of him was a piece of bread and a mug of cocoa, at which

he looked lugubriously. I felt pity for the poor old chap, and said to him, 'Dad, let me give you a sausage to eat with that bread.' He looked up at me and said, 'Thanks, I've ordered a beefsteak.' That was a lesson for me! And it's the same in religion. The man to whom we go with our particular meat has often got better himself. Tact is most essential in missionary work. The Association teaches that.

"But it did something more for me, something far greater. As it had saved my feet from sin, so it opened my eyes to God. In the moment when everything seemed false, and when my inexperienced mind was staggered by what I took to be my master's hypocrisy, the Association taught me, by the lives of its members, the self-sacrificing and noble lives of its members, that faith is something real and magnificent. Why I lay stress on this point you can probably guess. Some people think that any society formed like the Association, but for social purposes alone, would be just as useful to the young men of London. That is illusion. It must have the religious basis. If I had only gone to the Association for billiards or chess, or for literary and political debates, I should never have witnessed with my living eyes the beauty of faith.

"Men commit a great mistake when they take a lighthouse for a haven. Think of a ship making straight for the Eddystone! The Young Men's Christian Association is not a harbour. It is a lighthouse, and a very splendid lighthouse, set up in the midst of Life's dangerous seas; but not the haven where there is security and calm water. It may

save hundreds of men from dashing their lives to pieces on the rocks, but it will never bring peace to their souls unless they see that it lights the way to the harbour, which is Christ Himself."

Does the master, with his double life, remain a mystery ?

Think well before you answer. Happy are you in some ways if you can pronounce him, after reflection and after very honest self-examination, a monster, an ogre, and a most odious hypocrite ; for such a judgment would declare you not only ignorant of human life, particularly of human life in great cities, but innocent of secret sins in your own existence. A close observer, and one acquainted with psychology, will perhaps pronounce a more indulgent judgment. The saddest women in London have strange tales to tell of those who seek them in the shadows. The stockbroker and banker are very often cynical with good reason about religious people. The doctor in his consulting-room comes to believe that the double life is not an exception but the actual rule. And most men, I think, most men who are tremendously honest with themselves, know of secret doors in their souls which they themselves keep rigidly closed even against those nearest and dearest to them.

But the psychological interest of this story, profoundly reflected on, has the most saving illumination for the soul. It shows how great a gulf separates the man who is absolutely converted from the man who is simply struggling to be good. One knows for certain that this particular master,

in spite of his prayers and subscriptions, had never taken the great Decision which transforms character and literally *saves* the soul. You may hate the word conversion, you may regard all talk about a man being saved as so much odious cant, but you must confess that until that extraordinary thing called conversion happens in the life of an ordinary man he is exposed to danger, and may become as evil as the very worst of his fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER X

AN ORIGINAL CHARACTER

THERE must be, of course, among the London members of such a body as the Young Men's Christian Association a certain sameness of experience, a certain identity in character, a certain resemblance in manner and opinion; one does not easily discover in the ordinary man of sophisticated society, who has given himself early in life to the discipline of religion, that obvious and impressive emphasis of individuality, that clear, definite, and rough-hewn sense of reality, which strike one in the broken earthenware of humbler classes.

I was speaking on this matter one evening to a member of the Association who possesses in a rather remarkable degree the spirit of sympathy and the gift of humour. "Would you like," he asked me, "to see a real character, a real original?" The twinkle in his eyes and the laughter in his voice promised something worth a journey. It was seven o'clock; I had eaten nothing since one; the afternoon had been spent in Hoxton Market among the most tragic and distressing sights in London. I was rather tired; nevertheless, such assurance was in the invitation that I accepted it with alacrity. We set off then and there, and made our way to

the murky streets which surround Old Drury. It was nearly eleven o'clock before I got back to my hotel.

In a dark and quiet street my guide paused before the one bright window in a row of gloomy houses. It was a theatrical laundry. The big uncurtained window threw a haze of yellow light upon the damp street. Women were busily employed there, washing, wringing, ironing, and hanging to ropes suspended across the room the festive garments of theatrical ladies. Instead of the perfume of patchouli, a healthy smell of honest yellow soap, mingled with the damp and stifling atmosphere of steam, came from these garish garments, which hung like strangled ghosts in the moist air. No sound of singing or talking issued from this bright interior. The laundresses in their neat print dresses, sleeves rolled to the elbow, worked under the gas-jets in a hurrying silence. A couple of dreary children pressed their dirty faces against the window and watched the proceedings. The forlorn figure of a man in rags slouched by the open doorway, as if hoping for some job by which he might earn a night's lodging. He was shuffling his feet for warmth, and rubbing his hands together over his stomach. The road, the pavement, the walls and windows of this dark street, were wet with rain and fog.

We passed through the doorway, followed a passage to the back of the house, and entered a yard, so dark that it was impossible to see anything distinctly. A flight of wooden steps, such steps as might lead to a loft, rose abruptly in front of us

with a hand-rail none too steady at the side. I raised my eyes and saw in the air a little wooden house, like a cabman's shelter. Through the half-open door of this hut in the air shone the white light of incandescent gas. My guide mounted the steps, warning me to be careful; I followed him through the darkness, with some anxiety as to the descent. It was like climbing to a pigeon loft.

He pushed open the door and entered. A cheerful voice greeted him from the interior. His laughter and the laughter of another reached my ears as I passed through the doorway.

The interior of this tiny littered shed is such a place as Dickens or Balzac would have loved to discover, would have spent their fullest powers to describe. And the man who works there is such a person as Turgenev would have loved to know and loved to write about.

He is a man of medium height, spare of flesh, grey-faced, grey-headed, and grey-eyed, with something of a likeness to Lord Roberts, but with a sparkle of light in his shrewd eyes which is too human and tolerant and humorous for a soldier. He wore a cloth cap towards the back of his head, the peak pulled a little to one side. He was in shirt sleeves, with an apron over his clothes. At the opening of his waistcoat one saw a shirt-front and a black tie.

When I extended my hand to him, he examined the palm of his own for a moment with a rather lugubrious expression on his face, and then slipping it under his apron, and thus raising it to shake my hand, he said, with a very pleasant ripple of laughter,

"You'll excuse my glove, won't you?" Then, glancing about the workshop, "Where will you sit?" he asked, and laughed again. There was only one chair, and the back was broken.

The workshop was hung with the metal accoutrements of horse harness. The man is a coach-plater, and for a hundred years the name he bears has been famous for this particular work. His father made the brass harness for Queen Victoria's Coronation; Lord Mayors of London for many years have gone their triumphal progress in November with his brass harness on their horses' backs; the aristocracy have been his customers for the glory of their family coaches. The introduction of the motor-car and the disappearance of splendour from human equipages, have dealt hard blows to the coach-plater. His big shops have closed their shutters. The shed in the air is all that is now left to him. In this shed he does some of the finest work in plated harness to be found in all the world.

One side of the shed is occupied by a bench with two heavy iron vices clamped to the edge. A window overlooks this rough bench, which is strewed with tools and pieces of metal. At the end farthest from the door is a small forge; beside the forge, in a dark corner, stands a tall desk littered with dusty papers, a penny bottle of ink, and a bundle of broken pens. The red tiles of the roof are not obscured by plaster; from the rafters hang horse collars and two or three pairs of hames. There is a skylight in the centre of these cobwebbed tiles. A gas-jet projects from the wall. The wooden floor is shaky and uneven.

At first the coach-plater talked about his business, about the changes which had overtaken it, but not with bitterness, always with a ripple of amused laughter running through his words, an incurable cheerfulness of character saving him from bitterness or complaint. "I'm happy enough," he tells you; "happier than most, and a deal happier than I deserve to be. What are you laughing at?" he demands of my guide, laughing himself. "Why, you're always laughing; what's the matter with you?"

He leaned against the office-desk, his arms folded over his chest, one leg crossed over the other, only the toe of the boot on the ground. His hands rubbed the sides of his arms as he spoke; every now and then he raised the right hand, pushed back his cap, scratched his head, and then with a quick jerk pulled the peak of the cap forward over his eyes. After this the two hands resumed their incessant rubbings of the arms. He has the habit of sniffing through his nose now and then, as though the nostrils were obstructed. His eyebrows lift and twitch in sympathy with the sparkle of his eyes.

It was not long before we got him to talk about his religious experiences.

"When I was a young man," he said, "I lived for one thing, and one thing only—Sport. I dearly loved a bit of sport. I couldn't think that anything in the world compared with Sport; and certainly I didn't give anything else a single thought. I was a sinner, a real sinner—no getting away from that, mind you—but I was not vicious. Sport kept me from it. I didn't drink much, I didn't gamble at

all—once I had a shilling in a sweepstake, and lost every penny of it!—and I didn't lark about the streets at night. No, all the time I was at work I was thinking of boxing, rowing, and racing; and as soon as I could get away, I used to go down to Hungerford Stairs and scull on the Thames till it was dark. Then I would go where I could see a bit of fighting, or where I could get a sparring match for myself; and after that I went home, tumbled into bed—no prayers, of course—and fell asleep dreaming of Sport.

"Then a strange thing happened to me. I began to feel—I can't tell you how, for I don't know myself what began it—but I began to feel uneasy, unhappy, anxious, worried, as if things were going wrong with me. At this time I was a young man with plenty of money and a pretty tall opinion of myself. A friend of mine asked me if I wouldn't join the Young Men's Christian Association. I said I'd consider it. He asked me again; I consented. I joined the Association. After I had been a member for some time I began to see what was wrong with me. 'Hullo!' I said to myself, 'you've been living all this time without a reason, without a purpose; you don't know where you're going,' I said, 'you haven't a definite object in life. If you were to die,' I said, 'you'd be in a nice fix. What have you ever done? What are you doing now? Who made you? Why were you made? What are you here for? Where are you going when you die?' Well, I saw at once that I was living without religion. It seemed to me a sensible thing to do to get hold of religion. So I set about it.

"That's not an easy job, is it? especially when you're young, when you're thickheaded, when you think you know something. No, it's not easy! Anyway, *I* didn't find it easy. I listened to sermons, I read the Bible, I said prayers, I talked about religion with people I met, but the light didn't come; I was just about as wretched and miserable as any man can be. Well, if I knew a man or a dog who was suffering as I was suffering then, I should want to shoot the poor brute—just to put an end to that misery. I should—honest. It was something frightful. One day as I was crossing over Blackfriars Bridge I very nearly pitched myself over, very nearly—in fact, I was as near to it as any man could possibly go; for I had lost the wish to live, and I hadn't the strength to support the weight on my brain which was pressing me out of life. The gloom was something awful. The wretchedness—no words can describe it. How shall I tell you? It was a terrible loneliness in my soul. I couldn't get into contact with anything that gave me the feeling of companionship. I was alone, all alone by myself; not only, mark you, alone in the world of men, but alone in the whole universe. I hadn't a friend; I hadn't a single friend in all the great wide universe of Man and God. And I couldn't stand the solitude; it drove me to the verge of despair.

"How I came to the light was very simple. It was one evening as I was reading the Bible. I was following the words of John Fourteen: '*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.*' Well, that didn't help me.

My heart *was* troubled. I could not keep it from being troubled. All my misery rose from that fact. *Believe in God?* But I wanted to believe; I did believe; at least, I thought I did. *Believe also in Me.* Well, that was what I was struggling to do, that was what I had been praying for, that was what my life had become—a struggle to make myself believe in Christ. I read on. I came to Verse Six. At that moment, at the very first sight of the words, '*I am the way,*' darkness went clean out of my soul. It was all done in a second. Done for me. Done without my doing anything at all. The darkness went, the misery and wretchedness fell right away from me, and I was happy. I was so happy that I just sat perfectly still, feeling that wonderful happiness in my soul. And as I sat there I saw the truth of it. Christ had done everything; nothing that I could do was of any use. It was for me to accept, to follow, and to love. That was all. To accept, to follow, and to love.

"From that moment—it's over fifty years ago now—the sense of peace, the certainty of Christ, the conviction of my salvation through Him, have never left me. And I'll tell you something that may seem strange to you, but which is as true and real as the rest. Not once or twice, but often, very often, as I am working in this shop, I look up, raise my head, turn round, and see Christ—see Him standing here in this shop. I see Him as plainly as I see you now. It may be, I don't say it isn't—it may be that the vision comes from my own thoughts, for I am always thinking of Him; it may be, as you might say, I *make* the vision myself; there's no

knowing; but all the same, it's a real vision to me. I love to see it, I am happier for seeing it, and I hope it will last to my dying day. It doesn't excite me; it doesn't give me a single strange feeling or one wild, fanciful thought; it is just beautiful, and it makes me happy. I look up, see the vision, watch it steadily till it fades away, and then go on with my work—with fresh happiness in my heart. I hope you understand my meaning. I don't lay claim to anything particular. I don't set up for a mystic. All I say is this, that as I work in this shop I very often look up to see a vision of Christ regarding me, a vision which is as real to me as you are now, and the sight of that vision seems to me natural and beautiful; and I am happier for seeing it."

The written words can convey no idea of the impressiveness, the profound honesty, and convincing sanity of this utterance. The old coach-plater's face became very solemn. He kept his eyes fixed upon me, the head bent a little, the nervous mobile eyebrows low over the eyes, and still, the restless hands steady at the sides of the arms. The cheerfulness and willing humour of the voice quite departed, yet there was nothing artificial or theatrical in the solemn tones of the measured words. A certain hoarseness crept into his voice; there was a touch of tears in the grey eyes.

While he was speaking, I thought of the laundresses busy by gaslight in the house which hid this aerial hut from the street; and I wondered what they would think if they heard that the old coach-plater had seen this great vision in his workshop,

over their muddy backyard, in the midst of Old Drury. Would they believe ? Would they understand ?

I had heard that this man was a teacher of religion, and that ever since his conversion he had done a humble but remarkable work for Christianity in the neighbourhood of Old Drury. I asked him to tell me about this work.

He smiled, tilted back his cap, rubbed his head rather violently, and pulling the cap back over his eyes and shifting his feet, he made answer, " Well, you can't expect much from me. I needn't tell you, you can see it for yourself, that I'm an ignorant man ; at any rate, not an educated man. You can tell that from my speech. I've had no learning to speak of, except what I've picked up, going along. But I've got a certain amount of sense, and I have certainly had some very marvellous answers to my prayers, helping me ; and so, putting this and that together, I have done what I could to help others.

" I fancy I must have got the momentum in that direction from the Association. There were some very nice young fellows in the branch I attended, clever, well-educated, and gentlemanly young fellows, all doing something to help other people. The Association taught me a great deal in that way. It gave me the feeling that I must work, do something, give myself for others. I don't think I can ever speak too well of the Association, of what it has done for me, and of what I know it has done for many others. It's a fine thing, one of the greatest of our age.

o

"Well, I started a little Bible class of my own. It was rather successful, and some of the members began to look upon me—in spite of the fact of my being an ignorant man—as a kind of an inspired preacher, a sort of a born prophet! Well, one day somebody or other said to me, 'I wish you'd speak to a young friend of mine; he's in a difficulty; can't see his way clear.' 'Certainly,' I said; 'you send him up to me.' Well, he came. And, bless my soul, he was a young gentleman from Oxford! I thought to myself, 'Now you have gone and done it.' I seemed to see that this young man had been sent to me on purpose to take my conceit down. Why, he had got whole libraries in his head; and what I knew would have gone on a postage-stamp.

"However, I suggested a walk, and one Saturday afternoon we started off. He was interested in my class, and talked about it very nicely. Presently we slipped, quite naturally, into an argument; we began on the Bible, and before we had been at it five minutes I knew I was out of my depth. I didn't know Greek, I didn't know anything about dates and translations, and all the rest of it; in fact, it doesn't need me to tell you that the young gentleman very soon made mincemeat of *Me*. 'Well,' I told myself, 'you've taken on rather more this time, old cocky, than you can deal with!' If Bradlaugh himself had been walking at my side I couldn't have cut a poorer figure. I was very nearly throwing up the sponge.

"Then it came to me, all of a sudden, that I was trying to do then, just what I had been trying to do before my conversion—trying to do what had

already been done for me and for everybody else many years before—shoving myself forward, as you might say. With this thought in my mind I turned and gave the young gentleman a straight talk clean out of my heart, not one word of it from the brain. I asked him if he didn't want to be at peace ; if he didn't want to have rest of soul ; and I asked him if he thought Bradlaugh or Tom Paine or any other atheist could ever give him that. They might trouble his mind about the Bible, but could they give him peace, joy, love, holiness ? And I told him from my own experience that he himself could never get those things, not one of them. I told him that they were things neither to be learned nor earned—that they were gifts, gifts of God, gifts to the human heart through Christ Who had redeemed the human race.

" And do you know, something I said must have touched that young scholar's heart ; for although he could double me up in argument, he gave in one day, and told me that what I knew by experience was worth all he had ever learned from books. He became a Christian, a good Christian ! "

Many other stories, some of them encounters with atheists, the old coach-plater told me in his shed that night. He has won numbers of men from evil to goodness, has converted many, and has long been a centre of faith in a neighbourhood which seems dark and hideous with a vulgar materialism.

The following story is particularly interesting because of its strange ending.

Some years ago the coach-plater was asked to call upon a man who had no faith, and was ill and

was unhappy. This man in a small way was notorious for atheistical ideas.

"Have you spoken to him yourself?" asked the coach-plater. "Yes." "What did you say to him?" "I gave him Ephesians." "What?" said the coach-plater; "Ephesians! That's a bit stiff, isn't it? Is the man a Christian, then? I thought you told me he was an atheist?" "So he is." "Well, don't you think," asked the coach-plater, "that you're expecting a bit too much of him? Ephesians is good, very good; but Christ is better. You want to prepare the heart first with Christ before you get introducing Ephesians to the head." After that he promised to go and see the sick man. A certain clergyman, a great friend of the coach-plater, had already been there several times; but in vain. The coach-plater prayed for guidance, and set out to pay his first visit. The atheist he found was a hard man.

"I didn't talk to him about religion for some days," said the coach-plater. "I just used to drop in of an evening, go up to his bedroom, sit beside his pillow talking of anything that I thought might cheer him up, and then take my leave with the hope that he would pass a comfortable night. Very few of his friends came near him, so he was rather touched by these visits. Well, one evening he started the subject himself. He asked me what I believed and why I believed. I told him. He said he couldn't believe anything like that. He said he thought the Bible was a forgery. I said to him, 'Look here, just oblige me by telling me what year it is.' He seemed surprised. I pressed him. 'Come on,'

I said ; ' what year is it ? ' He told me. ' What ! ' I exclaimed, ' I thought the world was millions of years old ? ' ' So it is,' he said ; ' many millions.' ' But,' I answered, ' the date doesn't make it even two thousand—that's a rum go, that is ! You said millions, didn't you ? ' Then, as he was staring at me, I asked him if he didn't think it a strange thing that a *forgery*—something that had never happened —should have given the date to all civilised nations. The year of our Lord ; Anno Domini. Everything starting from the birth of someone who had never existed. What an extraordinary thing ! Certainly the calendar would never be altered to start from the birth of Tom Paine or Charles Bradlaugh. No one could imagine that. They had certainly lived ; but who would think of dating human experience from the year of their births ? *Why from Christ ?* A carpenter's son, a crucified man in a little obscure country that wasn't even free ! Surely, there must have been something very strange, and very wonderful, and very important, in this Christ. *He must have done something nobody else had done.*

" Well, from that I went on to the heart of things. I told him that salvation was a gift from God, that he had nothing to do but accept it, that God didn't give him anything hard or difficult to do, but on the contrary, wouldn't let him do anything at all. It was done for him. Christ had done it. All he had to do was to believe that Christ had done it. All he had to do was to let himself think of Christ having done it for him till gratitude came into his heart, and until gratitude changed to

love. He saw it. He came round in a few days. He became a happy man.

"One day a stranger came running up these stairs, calling for me. The poor sick fellow was dying and wanted to see me. He had told the messenger to look for me in 'the shop behind the house.' There wasn't time to wash or put on a coat even. I started off and ran round to the dying man just as I was, just as I am now—shirt-sleeves and apron.

"The wife and children were gathered round the bed. They were all weeping. A nurse was standing by the pillows. The man looked at me—he was perfectly conscious—and greeted me with his eyes. I took his hand and spoke to him. He said to me, 'What are they crying for? Why do they cry?' Then he smiled, and said to me, '*Why don't they sing?*' After a moment he repeated it, 'Why don't they sing?'—as if he were conscious of a coming glory. It was a difficult thing to do, but I and the nurse started a hymn, one of his favourites, and we sang it very softly round his bed. He lay there, smiling, with his eyes shut.

"Presently the end came quite near. I never saw anything like it before, and I don't expect to see anything like it again. The man said, calmly and happily, 'I'm going now.' And then he lifted his hand to say good-bye to his wife, just as if he was merely setting out on a journey. He bade her good-bye, thanked her for all her goodness and love; and then turned to the children. One by one he said good-bye to them. He told the girls always to mind what their mother said to them, and he

bade the boys be good and take care of their mother and help her. His voice seemed to be strong, his eyes seemed to be bright with life. It was just like a man going away on a journey. Finally he turned to me. 'Good-bye, Mr. ——,' he said, giving me his hand; and holding it, looking into my eyes with great meaning, he said, '*I shall see you again.*' At that very moment he died; without a struggle, without a gasp, without any visible collapse, the man lay suddenly and quietly dead. When I came to take my hand away, I found that I couldn't. The nurse had to unfasten the dead fingers. It was a wonderful death-bed!"

It will give some idea of the affection which this charming man, so original, and sensible, and whimsical, and tender-hearted, inspires in his friends, to tell the following incident. A member of his Bible class came round to the workshop one evening, and asked him if he would come and dine with a few friends in a restaurant. He said that such things were not in his way. The other persisted, said it was important, and finally persuaded the coach-plater to comply with the request. When he entered the room in which the dinner was served, he found it filled entirely with old members of his Bible class, gathered from all parts of London, some of them from the country. There were middle-aged men there whom he had not seen since their boyhood; men who said that they owed everything to his teaching and influence. At the end of the dinner a presentation was made to the coach-plater of a purse containing many pounds.

The dinner was given to show the love of his

friends, and the purse was subscribed because a few of those friends had heard how his business had suffered in recent years.

"I was once a bit of a swell, had plenty of money," he told me; "used to reckon myself one of the great merchants of the City of London!" He laughed, and scratched his head. "Well, most of that has gone. I'm rather a humble kind of person now; and I don't know that I'm sorry. I don't know that it has made *very* much difference to me. For one thing, I've let a good part of it go myself. I mean, I haven't pushed for orders. I was never one to eat up my neighbours. Live and let live! So long as I have got enough to keep me pleasantly busy, and can earn enough to pay my way honestly, I don't complain. This life isn't only a scramble for money. Oh no; it's something better than that!"

A really lovable, good man.

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE PUBLICAN

IN this strange story of a very ordinary life the reader will make acquaintance with one of those London interiors which, unknown to the majority of respectable people, are the radiant centre of I know not how many crowding lives.

"To begin with," says the handsome boy, laughing amusedly—and he nurses one of his knees, leans back on the table where he has perched himself, and regards me with a shy but calculating scrutiny—" to begin with I was born in a pub."

He is six-and-twenty, but looks not more than eighteen or nineteen. Nevertheless, his manner has all the ease, brightness, and assurance of a middle-aged *flâneur*. I am perplexed for a long time by the contradiction which exists between his appearance and his mind. The face suggests an angel—rather a well-bred and effeminate angel ; the manner is cynical, mocking, hard. It is difficult to believe that a youth so pretty and pleasing can have lived at close quarters with the squalor of depravity : more difficult to realise that a mind so apparently gay, cheerful, and almost flippant can ever have suffered the revolution of a great spiritual experience. But, the wind bloweth where it listeth.

As I look at him I see a handsome boy; as I listen to him, I hear a man of the world who knows everything. It is difficult for a long time to know what to make of him.

"It wasn't a very hopeful beginning," he says, with a smile which half closes the grey eyes and depresses the corners of the small mouth. He is evidently averse from tragedy or sentimentalism, is something of a humorist, deprecates anything in the nature of exaggeration. He continues: "A pub. in the middle of the City isn't exactly the place you'd choose for a kid's start in life. It sharpens the wits, I've no doubt; but it plays hanky-panky with the rest of one. I knew pretty well everything there is to know before I was nine; but what people call 'everything there is to know' is just that kind of thing which it is better not to know at all. My father owned the pub. It was a little place, and we did all the work ourselves. No barmen or barmaids—a family affair. It was one of those taverns which are in the nature of clubs; it had its regular customers; the stranger dropping in for a drink and then flying away was a rare bird. The same men came every night, and sat there, as a rule, till closing time. Everybody knew everybody else. They were small tradesmen, small business men, with a few salesmen from the markets. It was rather a jolly place in a way. Fellows played games there of various kinds—cards and dominoes. Games weren't allowed by law, but at the side of the place, up a little court, there was a door; we called it the 'Bobby's Door.' My father was never worried by the police!

"One of the features of the pub. was a Sunday excursion. My father used to get cheap tickets from the railway companies, sell them during the week at a small profit, and on Sunday he would take charge of the excursion, organise the catering, and run the whole show, there and back. They generally ended up with a carouse at home! I've heard some stories—you bet! Sometimes we would go to Brighton or Margate; sometimes inland to places like Wolverhampton. It meant hard work for my brother and myself. But it paid, and we always enjoyed the outing when we got it. Saturday nights, of course, were always our hardest times; but we had to be up at five next morning to prepare for the Sunday excursion. My brother and I worked like niggers. We had to be nippy, as you can imagine. Little sharp beggars we were!—not much idle time for getting into mischief. I've often worked in the bar, as a little kid, from eight in the morning till half-past twelve at night. Pretty long hours for a nipper! I understood before I was in my teens all about breaking-down spirits and fining-down beer. We used to fine down the beer with skate's-skin—stuff like London mud! I tell you, I don't want to drink any more beer. Water's good enough for this chicken!

"I began to drink when I was quite a kid. I got toothache one day; my face was swollen; and I looked generally dicky. Some fathead in the bar told me that stout was a certain cure. I tried it, and that was the beginning. Kids are challenged to drink in bars. Fellows seem to think it funny to see a little beggar rolling about drunk. I used to

be proud of my capacity. I'd drink great glasses of port, one after another. Sometimes I was sick. I used to run outside, making for the door with all my might. The fatheads used to laugh as if they would split. And then I'd come back and begin again.

"My father sent us to school in the neighbourhood. We were potboys and scholars all in one. I rather liked school. We were lively boys, and made friends. One of my friends was a tip-top decent sort of boy. He asked me once to meet him on Sunday and go to Sunday-school. From his description it sounded jolly. I regarded it as an excuse for getting away from home. Curious idea, wasn't it?—Sunday-school seemed to me a bit of an adventure, a new glimpse into the world outside our pub. I wanted to go very much. But when I asked my father's leave he fairly exploded at me. 'You dare to go to Sunday-school!' he shouted at me; 'you dare—that's all!' I felt as if I had proposed something wicked!"

He swings himself from the table to a tall office stool. He is becoming interested in his own story.

"Most extraordinary thing that—my father's point of view. He seemed to regard anything in the nature of religion with a positive aversion. And yet I never remember hearing him argue about religion. He wasn't an active enemy or an embittered critic. He never mentioned the subject himself. But you only had to suggest it to get him at boiling point. He swore at it, grew purple in the face, and then dropped it, like a hot coal. He was a big man, and tremendously fat. When I look back now I

can't imagine how he lived. He never took five minutes' exercise in the open air. From Monday morning to Saturday night he was in the pub. He used to sit in the bar, drinking with the customers. My mother and we two boys did most of the work of the house. On Sundays, in summer-time, he would go on our excursions ; but all the rest of his life he was seated on a stool in the bar, drinking and talking. I was not sufficiently interested in religion to be curious about his point of view ; I only knew that it was a subject which roused the lion's wrath. It's true to say that I grew up, in the very centre of London, without the smallest notion of Christianity. My mother ?—well, she was always so occupied. As far as I know she never once mentioned religion. It was with her as with thousands of others—she never gave it a thought. It didn't come into her life. At any rate my brother and I got no notion of religion from our parents. We grew up in absolute ignorance of the whole subject. In the very heart of the City ! I often think now what a jolly rum place London is. I dare say if you were to count all the children who don't even know the story of Christianity it would make a pretty considerable army. As I walk along the streets I often look into houses and wonder. . . .

" But I must tell you my story. I was—let me see—yes, I suppose I must have been over thirteen, thirteen and a half perhaps, when I began to get other notions of things. I ran up against one of my schoolfellows. It was in the streets. We had a chat, just about anything ; and then he introduced me to a friend of his. This friend belonged to

the Youths' Section of the Young Men's Christian Association in —— Street—a pretty lively crowd at that time! He told me about it—the games, sports, lectures, and Bible classes. It sounded all right. I told him I should like to join. And then he asked me to his house.

"To show you the state I was in, I found that this fellow's people had family worship, and after my first experience of such a thing, I took the chap on one side and asked him—'Is it serious?' I simply couldn't make it out. Reading the Bible out loud, and then kneeling down at a chair and praying to God!—it seemed to me a sort of game, something that couldn't possibly be real and serious.

"All the same, I was tremendously struck. For days afterwards I thought about that family worship. It haunted me. I was something like a fellow with a bee in his bonnet. I couldn't think of anything else. All day long in the pub., and afterwards, upstairs in my bed as I lay waiting for sleep, I thought of that little family, gathered together in a room, kneeling at chairs, and praying to God, praying to be good. The thing had photographed itself on my brain. I saw it as a picture. It kept jumping up in the dark, real as life. I thought about it.

"My father died about this time. I don't think it made much difference to me. My brother and I knew that there would be certain money to come to us when we were twenty-one, and that is about all we thought of the matter. We had to work harder than ever. My mother kept on the business,

and we boys were her only helpers. Mind you, I wasn't fifteen at the time. My brother was a year older. And we two youngsters practically ran that London pub. It's rather a queer experience, isn't it ?

"I joined the Youths' Section of the Young Men's Christian Association. As often as I could I ran round there in the evening and attended all the classes. I did it at first simply for something to do. My friend was a member. It was a case of wanting to keep up a friendship, and having something to do that was different from the day's work.

"To look back on that time is rather curious. I'm not sure if I quite knew what was happening to me. All day long I was among the bottles and barrels, surrounded by jovial drinkers, working like a galley-slave, and yet liking it all in some strange way which I can't define. Then in the evening I would spend an hour or two in the Association, at Bible classes and prayer meetings. Quite a different sort of thing ; and yet I liked that too. I got to know about God. Religion was no longer a strange idea to my mind. But nothing else, apparently—it's so difficult to say—occurred to me. The only definite effect of twelve months in the Youths' Section of the Young Men's Christian Association was to unsettle me. I felt myself unsettled. At the end of that twelve months I was unhappy and confused. I didn't know what to make of life. The things which had seemed to me normal, ordinary, inevitable, and quite respectable, now seemed somehow wrong, somehow false, somehow

dangerous. But, at the same time, the new things I had learned in the Association did not seem to me practical and real. I was troubled and bothered. It was like a fellow trying to find his way in a fog.

"One feeling began to emerge. I wanted to be good. I had a strong conviction in my soul that I could be better. That's really the first definite thing I can remember. Before I knew whether I believed or didn't believe what I was taught at the Association, I wanted to be good. I saw good as something desirable. And, as I say, I was quite certain—I didn't know how—that I could be better, happier. Drink gave me a momentary happiness, but I knew that it was a false kind of happiness. It was not merely that the happiness from drink ended in reaction, and that next morning I felt foul in the mouth, fuzzy in the head, and generally cheap and chippy. No; it wasn't only that. I had a quite clear notion that the happiness itself was not true happiness. I seemed to know for an absolute truth that real happiness was something altogether different. But what it was I could not have told anyone.

"I connected this happiness with the idea of being good. I suppose that something I had heard at a meeting in the Association must have stuck that idea in my mind. But it was vague and uncertain. I only felt that goodness had something to do with happiness. I didn't know it for a dead fact of life."

His face grows serious. He averts his gaze. Still nursing his knee, and leaning far back on the tall

stool, he looks up at the ceiling, wrinkles up his eyes, and reflects within himself. Then he says :

"And yet it was not only moral unrest. It was spiritual. I am sure it was my soul—seeking unity with God."

"You were working all this time in the public-house ?" I inquire.

He nods his head. "Yes, it was there, more than at the Association, that my soul was clamouring, clamouring and struggling, for that unity. I was only a kid ; I didn't understand ; but I was awfully unhappy. I was a child crying for something, and no one understanding. I had a dark time. In a way, it was a fight. Two worlds seemed to be tearing me between them. I couldn't quite decide which to choose. But I fought against what I felt to be bad, and I half fought against the influence that was drawing me away from what I felt to be bad.

"Something happened in the family at this time. My mother married again. It turned out to be a disastrous step. I don't want to say much about what followed. We were all pretty miserable, my poor mother most of all. The fellow turned out a real bad 'un. He had simply married my mother for her money, and made life a hell for all of us. Perhaps it had been a hell before ; but now it was a conscious hell. We knew all about it !

"Soon after her second marriage there was a special mission at the Young Men's Christian Association. A splendid fellow came down and delivered a series of addresses. He was the kind of man who makes a great impression on boys, and

his addresses were of the order that go straight to the heart, open all the secret doors of the inward life, and make a chap really look hard at his own face in God's mirror. I don't know if I explain what I mean. They weren't moral addresses, and they weren't expositions of Bible texts. They brought all the stirrings of the soul to the surface, and set the truth of one's own struggling spirit, the truth of one's own troubled and secret heart, clear before the gaze. Well, they simply lifted me clean out of my doubt and uncertainty. They made me see what I had never seen till that time—the necessity for a definite and resolute decision. I understood then that all this time I had been drifting. I knew that my mind had not taken a definite straight course one way or the other.

"At one of these meetings he called on all the youths present whose hearts were determined to decide for Christ, to stand up. I had the kind of feeling that I ought to stand up. I felt it would be like telling the truth, owning up, doing the straight thing. I don't think there was much more in it, except that I really did want to get settled and happy. Well, anyhow, I stood up. What happened I can't say. But I'm absolutely certain of this, the mere fact of standing up had a real spiritual effect. It's not easy to explain ; some people may even ridicule the idea ; but the fact remains all the same. Until I stood up, my mind was troubled and wretched and dark ; as soon as I stood up the trouble vanished, the wretchedness disappeared, I was conscious of light. That's what happened to me as near as I can explain it. I don't pretend for

a moment that it was a case of instant illumination. I didn't at that moment see the whole truth of religion, nor realise the whole spirit of the Christian life. Whatever happened to me, it was not a blinding, a dazzling, or even a quiet illumination. It was rather a cessation of struggle, an end of perplexity, just a peaceful, satisfied feeling that I had done a wise and right thing."

He seeks to get rid of anything mystic in this experience *so far as he himself is concerned.* He seems as if he wishes to convince one that the thing was normal and natural, something that any man may experience at any time if he makes up a definite mind to choose a direct course. But it was all the same the moment of his conversion. Afterwards he saw greater light, experienced a deeper joy, and is one of those men who will continue to grow in enlightenment; but at the moment when he stood up and felt his struggle suddenly collapse in his soul he was what men call *converted.* The decision was made. The change of soul was effected.

The serious look goes from his face, as if he is glad to get rid of the necessity for careful speaking. The smile comes back, the pleasing man-of-the-world smile so odd on the boyish face, the smile which wrinkles up the eyes and depresses the corners of the mouth.

"I'll tell you a little thing that had a help in shaping me," he says eagerly. "I noticed for the first time the—what shall I call it?—well, the extraordinary *placidity*—I think that's the word—of the men in charge of the Youths' Section at our branch

of the Association. We were rather a lively crowd. At times we were real beasts. From horse-play and cheek, we often went to something that was jolly near a riot. And yet, never once did the men lose their heads or go for us in any way. As soon as I began to notice this, it struck me as something worth thinking about. It occurred to me that if a similar rumpus was taking place in the pub. *I* should certainly not be placid! And then I began to think about the secret which kept those men calm and kind. They were not paid to teach us; they got nothing out of us; whether we were good or bad made no difference to their worldly fortune. And besides, they came to teach us in their spare time, when most men are thinking of themselves; and I guessed that it must sometimes be a bore for them, sometimes a frightful fag. And yet they were always *placid*. I was awfully struck by that.

"I began to be serious in my life. I wanted to get the secret of those men." He laughs softly, with great amusement at himself, tucking in his chin, as he adds: "To show you the funny little beggar I was, I used to take a candle upstairs, light it, and sit up half the night reading the Book of Genesis! I don't think it did me any good. But life wasn't at all easy just then. My stepfather was making things hum. Our home-life in the pub. was absolutely wretched. And then I felt unhappy about the drink trade. I didn't relish my share in a trade which did so much harm. It got on my conscience. Things went from bad to worse. While I was struggling with Genesis my stepfather was making ducks and drakes of the business. At last there was a general

shindy. The place was sold. We moved into the suburbs, and took a private house. Although I was glad to be out of the Trade, I don't mind telling you that I felt jolly unhappy when I went out of the pub. for the last time. I was between fifteen and sixteen, and the dirty little place was all I had ever known of home. Honestly, it hurt me to go.

"Well, to cut a long story short, things got so hot in the suburbs that it was quite impossible for my brother and myself to stay. We seemed to enrage our stepfather, which only made things worse for my poor mother. It was she who begged us to go. If I could have done any good I would have stayed ; but it was a hopeless case, quite hopeless. In fact, to tell you the truth, our stepfather kicked us out of doors. Well, I went to live with an aunt, and through the Young Men's Christian Association got a decent job in an office. I worked hard, liked it all right, and after work usually turned into the Association for an hour or two. I made it my club.

"It's rather curious, this, by the way. All the time I was using the Association like a club something was happening to me. An unconscious effect, I suppose you'd call it. The kindness I received, the atmosphere of friendship and goodwill, the religious tone of everything were giving me a twist towards the right direction. I was as moral as the rest of them, I suppose ; religion was a pretty real thing to me ; but I was still in the stage of reading Genesis by candlelight. Then it came to me from the Association, gradually, that the secret was Work.

"I don't know if that is the moment of illumination for other people. It was certainly mine. When the gradual process was completed I saw quite clearly that I must do something for other people. And then life seemed really a straight road. I saw that reading Genesis by candlelight wouldn't help me so much as spending half an hour in getting some other fellow over a stile, or trying to get another chap, who had fallen down, on to his feet. And it's perfectly true. Work has a most splendid and tonic effect on the soul. It gets a man out of himself. It's the real thing. You catch the enthusiasm of religion by working for other people.

"So I became a worker in the Association. And that's the end of my story. I'm doing very well in business, and all my spare time I give to working for the Association. I don't drink beer! I never take stout if I've got the toothache! And I find something better to do on Sunday than go on excursions! In short, I'm occupied and happy."

It seemed an absurd question to ask such a boy, but remembering that he is six-and-twenty I did ask if he was married.

"No; my brother and I have to keep my mother. Our beautiful stepfather got every penny of her money, and ours as well. He's dead now. And she lives in the country. We both contribute."

"And do you still live with your aunt?"

"No; in rooms."

"That's rather dull, isn't it?"

"Some rooms are awful, simply awful! But I've been lucky. For the last twelve months I've been in clover. The family I'm with are the best Chris-

tians I've ever known. The home-life is perfectly charming. I was converted ten years ago, about; but this last twelve months, simply from living with these people, have been twelve months of spiritual growth for me; I seem to have changed completely in the last year. I can't tell you what these people are to me. They're perfectly delightful. And it wasn't till I went to live with them that I had any idea at all what home-life could be. I learnt the beauty of a home in lodgings! It was the first Christian home I had ever struck.

"Yes, that's rather interesting. After ten years of Decision, I have experienced twelve months of spiritual growth. And it seems to me that I shall go on learning something fresh every day, go on growing, spiritually, till the end; which is better, at any rate it seems more interesting to me, than one tremendous moment settling everything and illuminating everything for evermore. Some men one way, and some another. Conversion isn't always a magic carpet that lifts one up and in a jiffy takes one to the goal. My experience is that Conversion means a turning about and a Decision for Christ. After that, growth and progress all the time. Something happens to one at the moment of Conversion, but it isn't the end, and it doesn't appear to me to be in the least unnatural."

Simple as this story is, a thoughtful man will not be able to read it, I think, without a feeling of its inner wonder. The question must occur, What would have been the course of this life if religion had not come to consecrate and direct it? Imagine the boy, kicked out of doors by his stepfather, left

to shift for himself in the streets of London. What would have been his fate? Think of him as the boy who spent all the beautiful and most innocent years of existence in a public-house. Turned like a dog into the streets, what course could his life have run but one of depravity and ruin?

Was it a chance too, only blind accident, that he made a friendship at school which introduced him to the idea of prayer, of family prayer, and afterwards brought him into touch with a religious society? Was there nothing but a boy's whim in the impulse which led him to become—this poor little potboy—a member of that religious society? If it is a question of temperament, from where did he get the religious inclination? In his house he learned nothing of religion; his life was calculated in every way to keep all notion of religion out of his soul; and his environment was one which makes for sin, vulgarity, carelessness, and a sort of coarse, sodden, and torpid brutality. Yet there was something in the boy's soul which opened to religion. An invisible Hand led him into a religious atmosphere; in that atmosphere he responded to religion. Is it easier to explain by an abrupt and dismissing use of the word Coincidence?—or by holding the faith of the best and noblest of humanity that the angels of God fight for us in the midst of the battle?

As I walked away from my meeting with this strange youth I wondered if George Williams dreamed, when he planned his pious society for drapers' assistants, that he was stretching out a hand through time which would one day lift a little

boy out of a public-house and bring him to the Cross of Christ.

Think what you will of this story, does it not convince you that in the midst of London there goes on all about us a great invisible struggle of the soul, and that the real drama of the City's life is with this spiritual conflict?

CHAPTER XII

THE BIG SCALE

I STATED in my Foreword that the reader would learn in the course of the narratives something about the great work of the Young Men's Christian Association in North America. The man of whom I give some account in this chapter is one of the Association's chief organisers in the United States and Canada, and he is perhaps better acquainted with the operations of the Brotherhood all over that vast continent than any other American.

"My own story won't interest you a bit," he protested. "There's nothing in it. I just came along, same as hundreds of other young fellows, got caught in the cogs of the Association, gave up everything else, and then went round with the wheels. I like going round with the wheels; it's all right. But I guess I can tell you other things that are really interesting. If you'll allow me. The Association in America is big. There's a lot to say about it. You don't get men like Mr. Roosevelt taking up things that are not big, and he's just dead keen on the Association. I tell you, people in England don't realise what the Association is in the United States *and* Canada. On the other side of

the Atlantic it's part of the national life. It's one of the great national forces. But here, why, seems to me, you're missing something that's worth while. You've got some splendid men at the head of the Association, some of the finest I've ever struck, but as a nation, as a government, you don't seem to catch on to a good thing even when you've got it.

"Now, I'll just tell you what the American branch sets out to do. Begin right here with what Mr. Roosevelt says. These are his very words:

> "'*All of us will make this twentieth century better, and not worse, than any century that has gone before in proportion as we approach the problems that face us, as the Young Men's Christian Association has approached them, with a firm resolution that it will neglect no one side of the development of the man, but will strive to make him decent, God-fearing, law-abiding, honour-loving, fearless and strong, able to hold his own in the hurly-burly of the world's work, able also to strive mightily that the forces of right may be in the end triumphant.*'

"Nothing of the milksop about that! No, sir, we don't manufacture milksops in the Association. And here's the secret. We don't organise ourselves on the lines that we're engaged in making men Christians, but on the lines that we're engaged in making Christian *men*. You'll admit that a man can be a Christian and awful poor stuff. There are some Christians you wouldn't care to employ to look after a yellow dog. Physically and mentally they're not up to standard. But make a Christian

man, and you've got the finest article of the human race, mentally and physically. Isn't that so? You can't beat the clean, straight fellow who follows the Ideal. He's top-notch. Whether it is as soldier or sailor, clerk or hand, merchant or lawyer, minister or doctor, the Christian *man* stands right out.

"Well, we say in America that every feature contributes to a Christian man. We say he has not only got to be moral but intellectual, not only good, but fit right through. And so we make every branch of the Association a manufactory for the highest type of civilised human—*the Christian man*. We get the best men to teach him the history and spirit of Christianity, so that he can hold his own in any argument as well as know how to live the life; and we get the best men to educate him in all secular subjects, so that he may be able to enjoy existence like a rational creature as well as fit himself for good employment; and we get the best physical directors to educate him in the development of his body, so that he may be able to appreciate the joy of health as well as save money on the doctor and prove himself a strong citizen, worthy of a great country.

"That reminds me. Here's a story might interest you. Two widows came one day to a branch of the Association in one of our largest manufacturing towns. They were ladies, but come down. I don't know whether you've got any of the sort over here; we've hundreds of them in the States. Rich one day, poor the next. Oh, they're common. Well, these two women were the widows of rich men.

And they'd both come right down. One was living by a little needlework ; the other, if I remember right, did a bit of washing. Anyway, these two widows came to the Association and asked to see the secretary. They told him that they each had a son, and that these boys were just running wild on the streets, growing anyhow. They wanted to know how much it would cost to buy a ticket for the boys ; each of them having made up her mind that if the scamps could only get into the Association it would be all right. Well, we took them in. Some rich man, if I remember, paid for the tickets. Those boys, sir, were wild. They were fair ragamuffins. But they took to the gymnasium like birds ; after the gymnasium we got them into the educational classes—we teach everything ; and after a little bit we moved them on to the Bible class, which was taken by the physical director. They cottoned right away. It was wonderful to see how those boys changed. Their souls were just waiting for that touch ! Instead of devils they became angels. Sweeter, better boys never chose the straight road. They were little men, heroes, chivalrous and noble-minded heroes. And they grew up to be first-rate citizens. One of them is with us still. We sent him to Chicago to study medicine, to fit himself for the work of physical director—all our physical directors have to pass proper medical examinations ; and do you know, that boy, who was earning thirty dollars a month at the time, sent ten dollars every month to his mother ! He told me that his one square table d'hote meal used to cost him fifteen cents a day. At night he ate a bit of

bread. He was a man. And to-day he's one of our best physical directors—keen as fire.

"Just take hold of these words—President Taft's words—they'll help to show you how the Association is recognised in the United States as a force in the national life. Oh, why isn't it like that in England? It ought to be; my, wouldn't it pull us all together! England, America, Canada, Australia—say, that's a big concern! Well, it will come. But here's what President Taft has to say:

"'There is possibly nothing needed worse in all our cities and towns than well-organised Young Men's Christian Associations which shall stand for character-building in the threefold way in which the Association endeavours to do its work.

"'*The railroad companies find it to their pecuniary interest to erect and fit up expensive structures for the rational, physical, intellectual, and moral amusement and entertainment of their employees on each division, and to put them under the control of the Young Men's Christian Association. So Congress directed that permission be granted to the Association to establish its work at the various posts of the army, and officers were enjoined to facilitate the efforts of the Association to provide healthful, physical, intellectual, and nonsectarian religious influences.*

"'President Roosevelt was directed by law to build the Panama Canal and as a business proposition one of the first things he did was to have erected four buildings for the Young Men's

Christian Association. When you want a capital operation performed you go to a good surgeon; when you want a lawsuit carried on as it ought to be carried on you go to a good lawyer; and when you want a means of keeping a population occupied during their leisure hours with rational amusement of a high moral and religious tone you go to those gentlemen who have had experience in carrying on such a work and such an institution. It cannot be learned over-night. It is just as illogical to say that you can learn it over-night as it is to say you can learn self-government over-night. You cannot do it. Therefore, what we did was to apply to the Young Men's Christian Association.'

"Perhaps that's news to you—about the railway companies and the army? But it ought to be the same over here. In America business men recognise that the moral character and the intellectual efficiency of the men they employ are matters of pretty well first-rate importance to the success of their undertakings. And so they build the great clubs, provide the equipment, and then come along to the Association for the men to run them. Why? Simply because we are recognised as experts in the making of men. There's no one else doing the same job. If a better institution came along we should have to shift. They're not in love with us simply because we call ourselves the Young Men's Christian Association, but because we do what we set out to do—which is to manufacture the best type of man known to civilisation. Our fellows would make

about as useful an army as you'd find in the world; pretty near every man is an athlete, pretty near every man is a marksman, pretty near every man is a teetotaller, and every man Jack of them is a Christian at least in the making. Cromwell's men were stiff stuff; I believe our fellows are as good. Cromwell hadn't got our gymnasiums!

"In Association work Canada and the United States are one, united in their organisation into one International Convention, supervised by an International Committee whose head-quarters are at New York with an office also at Montreal for special supervision of the Canadian work.

"The Canadians are every bit as keen as the 'Yankees,' and their work is going ahead at a tremendous pace.

"One of your own statesmen, Earl Grey, during the years he spent in Canada as Governor-General, observed and aided this movement. Note what he has to say about it.

"Here is an extract from the *Toronto World*:

> "'A happy incident of the day was the cordial interest in the campaign evinced by His Excellency Earl Grey, who arrived at head-quarters at 1.15 p.m., being received with tumultuous applause. He said, in part:
>
> "'"I happen to be here as an accident. Like everybody else, I was reading in the morning newspaper, and I was enthused by the account of your proceedings, and thought I would like to come and have a look at the Clock to see what it would indicate to-day."
>
> "'His Excellency recalled the occasion of a few

years ago when the Y.M.C.A. in Ottawa made a similar canvass. It was just at the time of the great financial stringency, and although it seemed impossible to accomplish the object which they had aimed at, they succeeded in raising the splendid sum of $200,000. By comparison, His Excellency felt quite certain that Toronto would raise the $600,000. He said :

" ' " I find myself in the midst of this great company of eager enthusiasts, who are all very anxious that within the allotted time you will gain the goal which you are aiming at. I have every confidence that you will succeed, and I hope you will succeed, *because I know of no undertaking which is fulfilling to greater satisfaction one of the most pressing needs of our great cities.*

" ' " There is no man for whom I have greater sympathy than the young man of business who is unable to afford the luxury of one of those expensive clubs where he can obtain recreation in his leisure hours. Unless there is such an institution as the Y.M.C.A. with all its wealth of equipment to meet his social and recreative requirements, society is asking him to live his life in conditions which are not fair to him. You are trying to give him opportunities for living a healthy, happy, wholesome and delightful life in the city of Toronto, and I heartily wish you, from the bottom of my heart, the full measure of success for all your endeavours, and wish the Y.M.C.A. of Toronto, and the new buildings for which you are about to provide, God-speed." '

" And here is a letter I have only just received from Lord Grey, which will show you how he feels about our present move over here :

" ' HOWICK, LESBURY,
" ' NORTHUMBERLAND,
" ' 20*th December*, 1911.

" ' DEAR MR. WARD,

" ' I hear you are endeavouring to raise £100,000 for a new Y.M.C.A. building in Tottenham Court Road, and that it is the hope of the members of the Y.M.C.A. of London to make the Tottenham Court Road building worthy in all respects of the parent institution of the countless branches which have been established all over the world, to the great advantage of all concerned.

" ' My experience in Canada leads me to believe that if you can succeed in bringing before the people of London the great advantages resulting from the establishment in its midst of Y.M.C.A.'s adequately equipped, as they are in the United States and in Canada, you will have no difficulty in raising the sum of £100,000 or more than that sum.

" ' In Ottawa, with a population of less than 80,000, the people raised, if I remember rightly, under your guidance, $200,000 in a two weeks' campaign, at a time in 1907 when there was a greater financial stringency in the money market than had ever been known before in our time ; and in Toronto, with a population of under 400,000, the sum of $800,000 was obtained in a similar fortnight's campaign during the following year.

" ' Although the institution of the Y.M.C.A. was originally started in England, my impression is that the people of Canada can offer to the people of England an example in the Y.M.C.A.'s, which are now established in all their principal cities, which the people of England would do well to follow. I have no hesitation in saying that the effect of the Y.M.C.A.'s in Canada

has been to save thousands of young men from going to the devil.

"'The methods you used in Canada were original, but most effective. They should produce equally good results in London.

"'Yours sincerely,

"(Sgd.) 'GREY.'

"I should like you to see some of our buildings. We don't go in for much beauty on the outside, and it's not only the size of them we buck about. It's the insides. They're bully! We take as much care with the insides of these huge blocks as a manufacturer with his factory. The rooms for the classes are all built with a purpose, and fitted up just perfectly. Our gymnasiums would make the mouths water of London clerks. Then we have running-tracks, swimming-baths, rifle-ranges, billiard-rooms, smoking-rooms, libraries, auditoriums for lectures—everything, in fact, for education, physical culture, mental improvement, and spiritual development.

"One of our secretaries is Fred B. Smith, and he's a genius. I dare say you know that he is the leader of the Men and Religion Forward Movement—a movement which is spreading right through the whole continent of America. America is more keen on that movement than anything else. It's the biggest thing we've got. That movement has five branches: (1) Evangelistic, (2) Bible Study, (3) Social Service, (4) Work for Boys, and (5) Industrial. There are specialists, real experts, for every one of these branches in ninety principal cities at the present moment—real experts, mind you; and arrangements are now being made for a thousand

cities to be touched in one season. It's as big a movement as we've ever had in the States ; all the churches are in it, and it's pulling the whole nation together. That's what religion does, when it's real.

"The type of evangelism has changed. The froth is off. The new evangelism teaches steady work and sacrifice. Revivalism is good as a tonic, but you couldn't live on tonic alone. It was the same with us as with you ; a revival came—and went. Plain water saw it out. The reaction didn't do good to anybody. But now we've got something different. We've got the idea of an Awakening, that's like a man quietly getting up to do a long day's work. You can't keep kicking a man out of bed without hurting him. And there's the window—he might chuck you out! This movement of ours is organised revivalism with the water off the boil. It's a nation waking up to make itself Christian. We believe that you've got to take just as much trouble to make a Christian man as to make anything else, whether it's a prize-fighter or an automobile. We think you shouldn't leave the making of a Christian man to chance. We think it should be the first concern. And that's what the Men and Religion Forward Movement is doing—feeding the Church and the Association right through the country. No more boiling revivalism, but steady work, regular work, persistent and organised work—all the time. What for ? To make men. To make men by educating them along the three great lines—physical, mental, and spiritual. We think we can do it. And when

we have done it we think we shall be a pretty good nation."

Although these words, when written, have something rather hard and self-confident about them, I can assure the reader that they were entirely without offence when uttered. One must always remember Sainte-Beuve's lament over the transformation from uttered to printed speech. *Paper cannot smile.* "The objection," he says, "has been urged against *Collections of Thoughts*, that when they are not commonplace they often appear pretentious; yet the same things would have struck us far otherwise, if we had heard them said. The smile and accent of the speaker would have won them acceptance; but fix them upon paper and it is quite another thing. Paper is brutish."

The speaker in this case is a man of middle age—quiet, modest, and both in appearance and manner entirely without the vigour of strenuosity. He has a peculiarly low voice, so that it is often hard to catch the end of his sentences. He speaks with an engaging smile, as gentle as a woman's. When he makes what may seem a boast, he looks at one with a pleasant apology in his eyes, as if to say, "Of course you understand; we're not talking algebra, are we?"

But in spite of his subdued manner and quiet voice, it is impossible to be long in his company before realising that he is a man of power. His position in America has been earned by solid achievement. He impresses one with the force of a resolute character perfectly in hand and subdued because it is enduring.

And penetrate beyond the faculty for organisation, and the grasp and power and vision which make him so great an energy in the Young Men's Christian Association of America, and you find that he has in his heart the steady faith of a convinced and realistic Christian. He knows life.

With him, as with the Founder of the Association in England, "first things come first." He has but one foundation for his life. To him, mercifully early in his experience, it came home that without the Ideal of Christ he could do nothing, and in all his work it is for the victory and unchallenged supremacy of Christ that he is striving, heart, brain, and soul.

But there are men who, insisting that first things should come first, take no steps to perfect second and third things. They rest with the first. "Make a man a Christian," they say, "and you have done all that can be done for him." It sounds true, and it is true. But their definition of a Christian, however completely it may square with all the doctrines of all the theologians, would not perhaps find favour with nature. The laws of God, which are of more importance than the laws of churches, demand in men strength of body and power of mind. Nature is pitiless to the weak, whether they be Christians, pagans, or materialists. And civilisation is more merciless than nature.

The man of whom I write smiles sadly at the notion that a Bible class and a bagatelle-table provide all the essentials for Christian manhood. The Bible is the first thing, and he places it first; but for the Bible's sake as well as the man's whom he essays

to teach the beauty and the power and the glory of that book, he would make the student strong in body and vigorous in mind. He says that nature is apt to flatten out the man with no muscles, and that civilisation jumps on him when he's down. He thinks that man is in the making, and the perfect man he holds to be the Christian man who is truly a Christian and as truly a man.

And his vision sees the Anglo-Saxon race, whom God—if any man believes in God—has so manifestly blessed and prospered in spite of many sins and innumerable follies ; his vision sees the Anglo-Saxon race united in the common Ideal of Christ, one in the sacred bonds of a religious brotherhood, working throughout the whole world for peace and knowledge and kindness—and leading all the nations of the earth to the kingdom of heaven.

" I don't want to interfere," he says, " with your own way of doing things ; but I should like England to realise that in the Young Men's Christian Association there exists the finest channel ever invented for a real brotherhood with America, if that is one of her ambitions. And the way, if I may suggest it, for the Association over here to take its proper place in the national life of England is the same way that we have gone in America. First the all-round development of men—body, soul, and spirit ; second, the multiplication all over the country of such buildings as you now have in Tottenham Court Road ; and third, the active, enthusiastic, and lavish support of your great merchants and men of business. There's Puritan blood on both sides of the Atlantic, and it ought

to have pretty much the same pulse-beats. Our rich men, yes, and our Government, are workers for the Association ; you ought to have it like that over here. If we could only pull together ! I want to see your railway companies, and your army and navy, and your great trading-houses working with the Association for Christian manhood. And I want to hear your King say what President Taft has said: '*The Young Men's Christian Association has come to be recognised as a powerful and necessary factor, both in business and government matters.*' Will it ever come to that over here, do you think ? Well, it will be as big as Waterloo when it does—for that means the Anglo-Saxon Brotherhood of God."

He placed his hand in his pocket and drew out a letter. "You might care," he said, "to read what President Taft says on the subject. I received this letter only the other day, written just after I had left America." He handed me the following document :

"The White House, Washington,
"*November* 13*th*, 1911.

"My dear Mr. Ward,

"I regret that I was unable, before your departure for London, to assist in dedicating the Young Men's Christian Association Memorial Building at that city, to express to you the interest which I take in the work of this efficient organisation. The value of its instrumentality in the promotion of good morals and in furnishing wholesome associations and healthful occupation for young men during their leisure hours has been practically demonstrated in the Canal Zone, where great benefit has been derived by the

Government from the maintenance of club-houses placed under the management of the Association.

"No less valuable in the direction of morality, health and efficiency has proved its work among the enlisted men of the Army and Navy of the United States. It is a potent factor in the preservation of the peace of the world, and it deserves the approval of everyone having the best good of the world at heart.

"The prosperity of the parent association at the capital of the British Empire is thus a matter of world interest, and my best wishes go with all who work to promote that prosperity.

"Sincerely yours,

"Wm. H. Taft."

He smiled as I looked up from my reading. "President Taft and ex-President Roosevelt have spoken," he said quietly; "I guess it's now the turn of King George and his ministers. Wasn't it, by the way, King George who said *Wake up, England?* Ah, I thought so. Well, let's hope!"

CHAPTER XIII

RANK AND FILE

A YOUNG man entered the room in which I was sitting one night at the Aldersgate Street branch of the Association. He was in a hurry, and could spare me only two minutes. He entered with a billycock hat on his head, which he did not remove ; he wore a brown mackintosh buttoned to the chin. In height he was nearly six feet. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep, and he held himself soldier-fashion—the head thrown back, the neck rigid, the body straight and oppugnant. I imagined his age to be three- or four-and-twenty.

He was black-haired, with one of those rosy faces which sometimes give to dark people a fresher and cleanlier appearance than belongs to the fair. His eyebrows were clearly defined ; the lashes thick, but short ; the upper lip was marked by a small moustache.

He had a curious trick of speaking. The teeth appeared to be tight-closed, the lips moved unwillingly, as it were, and with a threat, the chin projected a little ; he regarded one with the look of a boxer well on his guard and ready to let in a sudden and crashing blow. His words issued with the note of challenge.

That such a man might have derived benefit from the sports and games of the Association was palpable enough, but that he had felt in his soul the magic of religion, even obscurely, seemed to me at the first glance extremely problematical. And yet this young Achilles said something which haunts me yet, the impression of which will probably never fade from my mind.

He explained that he was going to take the chair at a religious meeting some distance away, and was already late. He could not possibly delay more than two minutes. I think he remained for five.

His work, he told me, was in one of the large warehouses of London. The majority of his fellow-clerks were absolutely indifferent to religion. There was no more immorality or looseness among them than is common in a great city, but they appeared to be wholly dead to the appeal of religion. "They don't think about it; they leave it alone," he said through his closed teeth, bitterly, and with a movement of his head which implied an equal amount of contempt and pity.

I inquired if he was chaffed or ragged by these men. "Not more than I can endure; they know when to stop," he said rather grimly, a light flashing into his dark eyes.

"You go in for athletics?"

"I scull every Saturday afternoon on the Thames."

"You don't find it hard to bear—the chaffing and ragging?"

"There's good in all of them, even the worst; I try to get at that. Three or four of us hold prayer

meetings and classes for the study of the Bible. We try to persuade the others to join us."

"And you don't despair?"

"No, I don't despair," he said. And then the colour in his cheeks seemed to deepen, he looked at me with an added defiance, and through his closed teeth he said, with an increased challenge in the voice—"*I've been wonderfully strengthened of late—feeding on the Word of God.*" He stood before me, with all the sense of restrained movement which one feels in a man anxious to be gone, and added, with a jerk of his head, "*Yes, I've been feeding on the Word of God.*"

Such words have often been addressed to me by old people, by dear old cottage women, and by grey-haired patriarchs of the fields; I have heard them and liked them, and looked at the old people who uttered them with a tenderness and an appreciation which in reality, perhaps, were nothing less pitiable than a mere intellectual indulgence—such as a father may show towards the first poems of his children or their earliest crude drawings of Christ and the Crucifixion. But when this young man uttered the words, "I've been feeding on the Word of God," something in them jarred upon my mind; I was distressed; I wished he had expressed the same thought as I myself might have expressed it. They seemed to me to ring false, unreal, artificial.

But they remained in my mind. They haunted me. The young man rose up again and again before my mental vision, tall, straight, powerful, the very picture of a formidable athlete; and again and again, through his clenched teeth, with that

strange ringing note of an almost angry defiance came the words, "*I've been wonderfully strengthened of late—feeding on the Word of God. Yes, I've been feeding on the Word of God.*"

They haunted me, till they grew familiar. It seemed to me that I had heard them before, many years ago, and uttered by some similar man in the midst of London. Then it came home to me that I associated this young warehouseman with Matthew Arnold. I thought. In a moment there flashed back to my remembrance a certain sonnet. When I returned to my home I took down from the shelves the green book of Matthew Arnold's poems, and turned to the sonnet (not by any means a good or memorable sonnet) called *East London*. Almost the identical thought was there :

> 'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
> Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
> And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
> In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.
>
> I met a preacher there I knew, and said :
> "Ill and o'erwork'd how fare you in this scene?"—
> "Bravely!" said he ; for I of late have been
> Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread.*"

This faith Matthew Arnold called "a mark of everlasting light" set up "above the howling senses' ebb and flow."

The wonder of the words came home to me, the wonder and the romance. The young and vigorous warehouseman finds in the midst of a difficult and disheartening life strength sufficient for his needs from the Word of God ; and the refined and educated clergyman in Bethnal Green, ill and overworked, found sufficient strength in Christ the living bread

for his hard and heart-breaking life. And in each case, when we penetrate below the form of words—always reminding ourselves that words are but the human invention of symbolism to express other things—we find that the mystery conducts us through the travail of the soul to the Presence and Companionship of Christ. Does not that thought strike on the mind arrestingly? Think for a moment what it really means—the fact of Christ's Presence in the hearts of toiling men.

In a London warehouse, a young man, strong and hardy above the average—who sculls every Saturday afternoon upon the Thames—finds in reading a book which relates the most important chapters in the rise of humanity from superstition and magic to a pure belief in One God, and which further declares the revelation made to a risen humanity by this One God in the Person of Jesus Christ, Light of the World and Saviour of Mankind—a strength for his soul which nothing else can give. For years he has been active in religious work, for years he has prayed night and morning with a complete faith; but the real strength has come to him recently from reading this single book, this Bible, this Word of God. And he tells you so, with a defiance which endeavours to express the immense certainty of his soul. Christ is real to this man. He could not imagine his drab life without Christ. The Bible is his strength. It is a thought, if you reflect upon it, which helps the mind to realise something of the romance of London, something of the unique power of the Bible, and something of the great mystery which overshadows human life.

I do not think I shall ever forget the impression made upon my mind by these words, and when I hear them on the lips of almost inarticulate peasants I shall understand their significance.

When the young athlete had gone, another and a quite different man entered the room. He was shy, timid, strange. Three or four years older than the athlete, he yet appeared, because of his extraordinary gentleness, much younger, and almost childlike. Few faces have I seen more strangely beautiful, few voices have I heard more low and mysterious. He brought into the room with him the sanctity and holiness of a mystic's cell.

He was of middle height, with a weak body on which the thin clothes hung loosely and as it were pathetically. The long narrow hands were held in front of him, the fingers slowly fidgeting with the ends of the sleeves, which were worn and frayed. The head was large, too large for the body, but perfectly shaped. Thick and shining dark brown hair framed a fair face that was flushed and almost feverish. The nostrils expressed the utmost sensibility; the mouth was gentle and refined—a little weak and yielding, perhaps; the very large and brilliant dark eyes possessed beneath their surface light of almost startled timidity, unfathomable depths of serenity. The whole character of the man's soul showed itself in a general air of shrinking and affrighted modesty.

In a voice very low and musical, speaking with long pauses between each sentence, and with the deep ring and subdued gentleness of the Welsh

in his intonation, never once raising his voice, he talked to me of his experience in London. He said: "I was somewhat prepared for what I had to undergo by my experience at home. When I left school I was apprenticed to a draper in my native town. It was terrible to me at first. I think it was the first *shock* I had ever suffered. Before that time life had seemed to me very beautiful. I loved my home—my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters. Then the fields and the mountains and the rivers were very beautiful. I used to go out alone. I love the country. In the country you can be quite alone. And where I lived it is very beautiful—mountains, rivers, and wild flowers in the field.

"I did not like school very much. I am not clever. I did not get on as quickly as the others. But I did not mind school. I was living at home, and there were hours of freedom; I could go out into the country alone. But when I went to business, and was kept in all day, and had to live with other people who were strangers to me—I was terribly unhappy. It seemed to me that life had altogether changed; that the beautiful part was over and would never return.

"So I was prepared for London. I did not expect to be happy. I knew it would be worse, worse even than the shop in my native town. And I was so sorry to leave my father and mother, and my sisters, and the country. But it was necessary for me to get on. My brothers had gone to Australia. They are doing very well there; they want me to join them; and I think it would be happier there; perhaps I shall go; I am thinking about it."

I asked him if Christianity had made any real entrance into his life during his youth. He told me that religion had been real to him from childhood. The beginning of his illumination came while he was at Sunday-school. He *felt* in his soul the immense mystery and the overwhelming truth of the Christ's experience on earth. It was tremendously real to him. In youth he joined the Christian Endeavour and sought to make others feel what was so intensely real to him.

"And in London," I said, "what were your first feelings?"

"I was stunned," he said quietly, with a sad smile. "It was not a shock, like the experience in my native town; but it was bewildering. I felt lost. Oh, it was dreadful! The bedroom in the warehouse was horrible. It was like a stable. There was no carpet; and so dark; with the beds all close together, and they were grimy. There was no sitting-room. We slept in the dark cold bedroom, and that was all the place we had for our leisure. The conversation was dreadful. The men seemed to wish to make themselves out worse and more horrible than they were. It was an atmosphere of moral degeneration. They talked of dreadful things. They mocked at religion. And it is like that still. They do not seem as if they can understand what is beautiful."

I asked what they talk about.

"Of betting and drink"—he paused, and in a lower voice he added—"and women." Something more than the exquisite sensibility of a refined mind sounded in that last word; it was the chastity and the chivalry of a perfectly pure soul.

"Tell me," I asked, "do you say your prayers in the dormitory?"

"Yes."

"Do the others molest you?"

"I am a little bit scoffed at," he said slowly, "but I think I am admired for my consistency. If I did not live the Christian life, as well as I can, they would be cruel to me. But they know it is real to me. They cannot understand it, but they seem to know it is real to me. And I never answer when they mock me. I do not reproach them. I only speak about religion when they ask me."

"How many men share your life in the warehouse?"

"There are two or three Christians out of a hundred." For the first time he hurried in his speech. "But," he added eagerly, "all of them have good traits. There is not one who is altogether bad. I have learned to know how much goodness there is in men, even those who seem bad. There is always something good in their hearts, though they may seem to hide it. Not all who go to church are Christians, and not all who stay away from church are not Christian. I noticed this about them: when I first came they held aloof from me for some months; I thought it was cruelty; I thought they would have nothing to do with me because I read my Bible and said my prayers; but I see now they were watching my life to see if I was genuine. And now they do not hold aloof. They are never cruel. Even the worst of chaps admire genuineness."

"Those first months must have been hard for you."

"I don't know what would have happened to me

in London but for the Young Men's Christian Association. At first, before I knew my way about, I used to go to the churches on Sunday. Oh, but I felt myself so lost, so friendless in those big London churches! They are so cold. Nobody speaks to you. Nobody seems kind. I think I was terribly miserable in those churches. But when I was introduced to the Association, I found people who were warm-hearted and kind, and seemed glad to see me. And they gave me chances to work. I was happy when I could do something to help other people.

"Another thing about the Association—you can get solitude there. In rooms, which are set apart for study, you can go and be alone with yourself. I think my first feeling when I came to London was the fear that I should never have solitude. It seemed to me that in London you couldn't get alone with yourself. That was terrible. In the dormitory and in the warehouse there were always many people; and when you went out into the streets there were crowds and crowds. Oh, how often I longed for the mountains and the rivers! I wanted the country. I wanted to get away and be alone with myself, so that I might think."

He told me that next to the pleasure he derived from working actively for religion through the Association, he most appreciated this great blessing of solitude which the Association made possible for his soul. He impressed upon me the idea of a veritable hunger after loneliness which eats away the heart of certain men condemned to live a barrack life in London. Hitherto I had regarded the

Association as a great central escape from solitude and isolation; now it was revealed to me as an oasis of silence and retreat in the midst of multitudinous obsession.

As I took leave of this remarkable man I asked him: "Is it difficult to live a mystic's life in London?"

He smiled. "It is not always easy," he said softly.

"Have you ever seen visions or heard voices?"

He shook his head.

"Not even in the country?"

"They are nearer there, I think. If I could live always in the country I should be happy. But one has to work. My brothers tell me that in Australia it is very beautiful."

So we parted. As we shook hands, and he looked at me with his large and timid eyes, I thought of Gray who suffered so frightfully at school and at Cambridge, of Shelley who shrank with horror from the coarse contact of the world, and of all other delicate and tender natures for whom the pressure of the multitude is a torment. How dreadful for such a man to live his life in a London warehouse!

A third man with whom I made acquaintance was as different from the other two as they were different from each other. He was a little fellow, wearing spectacles, and pale with the pallor of London's second or third generation. I should say he was typical of the suburbs.

There are many young men in London, physically feeble and intellectually poor, who yet convey to

one, and quite quietly, a sense of self-assurance and a resourcefulness of self-dependence which convince one of complete efficiency. They seem as if they too—these pale-faced, thin-bodied, and stunted weaklings—could go anywhere and do anything.

Such was the man who told me the following story.

"My home was perfectly moral, but there was no religion. My parents never went to church and never showed any interest in religion. But my mother appeared to think it was among the respectabilities for her children to go to church services, and so we were sent every Sunday, and in the afternoon we attended Sunday-school. If I got any good from all this it must have been subconscious. I was not aware that it made the slightest difference to my life. When I grew up and went out as a clerk I soon dropped going to church. To put it in a common phrase, I was sick of the whole business. I don't mean that I was sick of religion. I really hadn't thought about that; it didn't live in my life. All I was sick of was going to church.

"I lived a pretty ordinary life for a few years.

"Then, one summer, I went for my holidays to Broadstairs. I stayed at a boarding-house which a fellow-clerk had recommended. It was there that the change began in my life. Among the guests was a lady who was deeply religious. One day the guests organised a picnic, and at this picnic, somehow or another, conversation turned on atheism. Several of the people said they didn't believe in anything, and nearly everybody seemed to agree that going to church was only a farce. The lady

did not make a remark, so far as I remember, during this discussion ; but afterwards, as we were standing about ready to go home, she came to me and said, 'I hope you don't share the views we have just heard.' I was taken aback. I think I smiled. I said, 'I don't know.'

"From that time we became friends. She gave me quite a different attitude towards religion, but I don't think she gave me religion itself. I saw that it was something much more real than I had thought it to be ; and I also felt deeply that it was ever so much more interesting than I had imagined. Although I feel that I owe everything to that lady, who is now one of my closest and most honoured friends, I cannot say that she herself gave me the new birth of the religious life.

"When I got back to London I began going to church. I joined the church club—but that did me more harm than good. I don't want to say anything unkind about those particular clergymen, for it was really not their fault, but that club was really a very low place. Gambling was general, men drank just as much as if they were in a public-house, and the language was about as low as anyone can imagine. Of course, when one of the clergy came in, all was in due order ; but no sooner was his back turned than things became as bad as before, rather worse, as if to show that the members didn't care ! I was tremendously fond of chess, and used to play every night from seven till eleven. It exhausted me mentally, and did me harm spiritually, by absorbing all my attention.

"Then I began to read the Bible. I started at the

beginning and determined to read it right through, in the hope of finding out what I really did believe and, if possible, what I ought to believe. It took me a whole year, and I was no wiser at the end.

"One day a friend of mine suggested that I should join the Young Men's Christian Association. He spoke about the opportunities it gave one for work. I wasn't very keen, and said I would think about it. He said that a man couldn't understand religion till he began to live the life.

"I saw a book one day that attracted my attention. It was called *Conversations with Christ.* I got hold of it and took it home to read. I was reading it in my lodgings one evening when the application form for membership in the Association arrived by post. When I had glanced through it, I went on reading the book, holding the form in my hand.

"I came to the conversation with the lawyer who asked Christ, '*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*' When I got to the words, '*This do, and thou shalt live,*' I felt, all of a sudden, just as if they were spoken to me. It was an unmistakable feeling. It was something I had never experienced before. And the feeling came with the words *This do* before I finished the sentence. It was as if they were spoken to me, with an extraordinary emphasis, THIS DO! And I can't tell you why, but I instantly connected the injunction, which I felt to be unmistakably real and unmistakably personal, with the application form which I was holding in my hand. There and then I filled it up, signed my name, and sent it off by the midnight post.

"I felt that the command THIS DO did not refer simply to the Young Men's Christian Association, but to the work which I had been told was waiting there for me to do. I took it at once to be a message to work.

"I do not call this experience my conversion. I joined the Association, I took up work, and I enjoyed doing it; but my conversion came later. It really came to me through the reading of a book called *Spiritual Blessings*. I forget the author's name, but I remember it was published in one of Macmillan's series. I do not remember any particular words which had a marked or sudden effect upon me; but while I was reading the book the knowledge came home to my soul, neither gradually nor yet suddenly, that justification is not by our tears, our prayers, or our work, but by God. I realised that everything was done and given by God, and that a man has nothing to do but bow with gratitude before his Maker, and accept the gift of His mercy and His love. And when I was made aware of this truth, for it seemed to come from outside me, I felt conscious of some mysterious relief. It was as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders, as if a load I had long been carrying, and had even got used to, had all of a sudden dropped to the ground. I felt that all anxiety was gone. I was not excited or carried away, but I was aware of a sort of deep joy."

He told me some interesting stories of his work.

"The first experience I ever had of listening to a man's trouble and trying to help him," he said, "occurred very soon after my illumination. A

young foreigner arrived at one of the evening meetings of the Association. He appeared to be in very deep trouble. When the meeting closed I went to him and asked if I could be of any help to him. He told me that he was a Pole, and that he had been in Australia, where he had been converted ; but on his return home he found that his wife had gone away, abandoned the home ; he now knew, he told me, that she was living as a governess in Berlin. Then he said to me, ' But I know she will come back to me ; I have prayed, and God will hear my prayer ; I am sure she will come back.' I became friendly with him ; he was a fine fellow, and a real Christian. Some months after his wife came back. She had no idea of the change in his life, and had returned only because she felt a vague conviction that it was her duty. Soon after her return, however, she became a Christian. Their home is happy ; he simply adores her ; and you could not meet nicer people.

" That was my first experience of trying to help a fellow-creature.

" It is really wonderful how many opportunities the Association puts in a man's way for doing simple but lasting work. I'm sure if people recognised how it adds to the interest of life, and how it satisfies one's own mind to be a worker for the help and comfort of others, we should have a very much larger membership on these lines alone. There must be thousands of people in London wanting friendship, kindness, and advice ; and of course there are thousands who find life dull because they have got no enthusiasm for anything.

"I was once speaking to a few fellows in the Association about my own doubts and difficulties, telling them how I had come to find light and peace of soul. Another man, not in the group, came up to me afterwards, told me that he had overheard what I said, and added that he had a friend who was then in much the same difficulty as I had been ; and he would be very glad if I would meet this man and speak to him. Merely from that little incident I made a great friend, and was able to help a fellow-creature to real happiness.

"It's very helpful, too, to get into relationship with foreigners ; that is one of the great pulls of the Association. We meet men of all nations, and learn to understand their point of view. I was once struck by the loneliness of a young Frenchman who had lately joined, and seemed to be rather diffident about making friends. I chummed up with him, suggested that we should go for a country walk together on the following Saturday afternoon, and found that he was not only a very nice fellow indeed, but that he wanted to talk about religion. I made friends with him simply out of a feeling of Christian fellowship, and with no thought of playing the missionary ; but it turned out that I could help him. That is one of the reasons why I am so keen about the Association. It gives the ordinary man, who has his living to get, intelligent occupation for his leisure, broadens his sympathies by acquaintance with men of all nations, and gives him endless opportunities for deepening his own spiritual life by simply chatting with the friends he makes there. I don't believe anything helps a man so much to

realise the truth of the Christian life as talking things over with other people of his own age, and trying to help them in their troubles."

His face brightened, and he beamed at me through his glasses as he said, "I'm going out this week for a Saturday ramble with two young Japanese. They're very clever fellows, and very nice; and they want me to talk to them about Christianity. So this Saturday we shall take train, get out of London, and then walk through the fields, talking about the religion of Christ. I'm looking forward to it with great interest. You can imagine that it will be a fine opportunity. I believe Japan is more interested in Christianity than any other nation in the East."

From these brief conversations the reader will surely gather that the Young Men's Christian Association provides intelligent and thoughtful men with an almost unique opportunity for the work which alone can render life beautiful and strong and pure.

In sudden and too transitory moments of illumination most men perceive that religion is fundamental to the security of civilisation and the endurance of the moral qualities in man. It may be but the slightest occurrence that provokes this realisation, that flashes for a moment before the apprehension this tremendous and far-reaching truth; such a little thing as a party of hoarse-voiced and guffawing hooligans bawling a banal song through the midnight streets, careless if they wake the feverish sick or disturb the pillow of the dying; such a little thing

as a newspaper placard screaming from one end of the metropolis of a great empire to the other that some chorus-girl is married, some negro prize-fighter arrived in England, or the results of a horse race; such a little thing as a play produced in a London theatre in which indelicacies which would offend almost every home in the land are the cause of delighted laughter in men and women of all classes night after night for a long season; such a little thing as one young drunken woman staggering through the streets to her children, hungry and afraid in their slum home as the young of no other species in creation are hungry and afraid; such a little thing as the violence, which actively denies God and His Christ, practised by a mob of strikers or a mob of political women in moments of hateful anarchy; such a little thing as the success and popularity of newspapers which make their appeal to the basest and most sordid instincts of human nature; such a little thing as the unchallenged presence in the House of Commons and the House of Lords of men whose names are a byword for iniquity and crime; such a little thing as the sudden feeling, due perhaps to some quite trivial event, that a really vital public opinion on all great moral issues has ceased to exist throughout the length and breadth of a materialistic England.

But the realisation that religion is fundamental both to national greatness and to the moral progress of human nature should be a permanent conviction of the mind, the deepest and the most earnest—a conviction entirely independent of chance occurrence for its emphasis. From the beginning

of time there have been no morals without religion ; and every period in the world's history of a great moral decadence, and the downfall of mighty empires, has been preceded by the triumphs of scepticism. Never has a god fallen, perhaps, without crushing some of his devotees. Certainly never has nation, race, or tribe produced a code of ethics without the sanction of some faith in powers greater than mankind. It is as huge a folly to think that grammar preceded language as to imagine that there was morality before there was religion.

Does ever any thoughtful man walk through the streets of London, or Manchester, or Liverpool, or Glasgow, or Dublin, without feeling in his soul that the denial of God—which means among other things the denial of those laws of God which are in operation for our welfare—is fatal to human progress ? Not merely the presence of striking and abominable things forces this conviction upon the soul—such things as public-houses packed with women, or the frightful juxtaposition of enormous luxury and appalling beggary—but the look in the faces of the ordinary people, rich or poor, who pass one in the streets. How much coldness, hardness, aloofness, and self-satisfaction in the faces of the well-to-do ; how little benevolence, modesty, sweetness, and refinement of spirit !—and in the faces of the struggling workers, how much savagery, brutality, bitterness, and sorrow dumb as death but watchful as hate !

Is it not as if one walked among a people who had a loathing for life and a contempt for beauty, to whom the glory of aspiration had never

once come, nor the sanctifying humility which inspires the soul of those who realise their dependence on God ? One feels that the world is peopled by a disillusioned and disenchanted humanity. It is as if all joy and all tragedy were crushed out of existence by a universal weariness and fatigue. Here and there one hears laughter—it is from a public-house. Here and there one sees vivacity—it is in the face of a courtesan. But for the most part the crowds go by, grey, silent, and oppressed. Stand at the corner of London Bridge or Blackfriars Bridge, or in the streets of Oldham, when the workers are going home. Look in their faces. It is not poverty or coarseness or vulgarity or wickedness which appals you : but hardness and absence of joy. Can a people so hard and dispirited, so joyless and divided, so little conscious either of immortality or brotherhood, support the strain of its own godless materialism ? can they even work out those high and splendid destinies of empire for which enthusiasm and faith are the first essentials ?

It is my hope, as I bring this book to an end, that those of my readers who are either in despair about the future, or careless as to the fate of humanity, may realise that there exists among the multitudes of their fellow-creatures a great hope and a great call to personal service in that " pressure of the soul " which is one of the strange signs of this troubled age, and to guide which is one of the first duties of those who very really and very earnestly have their affiance in Christ. Everywhere, when we penetrate beneath the surface of society, there is this disquiet of the spirit, this pressure of

the soul, this dissatisfaction with earthly things, this hunger after satisfaction and peace. The ordinary man is conscious, dimly enough it may be, of the extraordinary thing. No man alone with his inward being is really an atheist, save those who are really devils. The whole nation, one may say, is tormented by a division of the soul which lacks the decisive choice. Not yet do they give themselves to God; but not yet, God be thanked, do they give themselves wholly to the devil. One way or the other will the choice be made. Democracy growing articulate, aristocracy growing afraid, will soon end the pestering unrest which disturbs their happiness by deciding either for God or the devil.

To make that decision ring true for God is the work of the present time. And that there is strong ground for hope that England will decide for God, no man who is acquainted with the clamour of the soul of even the most ordinary and vulgar for deeper satisfaction, and with the work of those who labour for religion in every quarter of the land, can really doubt.

Take but one case. Is it not manifest, even from what has been told in this book, that if the merchants and the civic powers of England devoted themselves, as men of their own blood have done in America, to the development of the Young Men's Christian Association throughout the country, we should possess in less than a generation such a manhood in our cities as would be a strength to the empire, a glory to the race, and a power for the things of God? Here is, at our hand, this Association—long-founded and already flourishing—

which could literally save to manhood and religion hundreds of thousands of young men now drifting into indifference and decadence, if the religious conscience of England realised the opportunity and gave itself with enthusiasm to the work.

And all over England there are good men in equally worthy societies waiting to do a tremendous work for humanity in the name of God, but who are paralysed by want of sympathy and enthusiasm from the whole nation. And this lack of sympathy and this want of enthusiasm are due to the pessimism that religion is exhausted and the miracle exposed. Progress has been handed over to the politicians. Enlightenment is looked for only from the men of science. As if politics or science could touch the soul of humanity! And in the meantime, all round us and about us, through the humble labours of obscure but holy men and women, Christ is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead.

If England, as some think, is now falling through materialism into anarchy and ruin, may one not suppose that there is a sigh in heaven, and that once more those words are breathed with sorrowful compassion, "*Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life*"?

Before England abandons herself to the politician, it would be well for her once more to make her appeal, earnestly and universally, to the Christ Who called Himself Son of God and Light of the World.

Date Due

PRINTED IN U. S. A.